



CRISIS OF THE SPANISH MONARCHY AND THE NEED FOR A REPUBLICAN RIGHT

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Cuevas



Twilight Of The Myth Of The Wonder King

In the history of ideas, a monarch, who rules a State, always appears as an analogy to God, who rules the world. During the Middle Ages and well into the Modern era, kings had, for large masses of the people, a supernatural, character, even physically. Part of the vital force of the monarchy was that the king could perform miracles and, above all, heal with the imposition of hands, as the great French historian Marc Bloch explained, with numerous examples, in his famous book, *The Royal Touch*. According to Bloch, the last attempt to make the monarchy practical and serious with such religious representations took place in 1825, when [Charles X](#) of France wanted to heal by laying on of hands, an attempt that was nothing more than a painful romantic imitation.

The myth of the thaumaturge king lacked tradition in Spain. However, one hundred and fifty years after its end in France, there were attempts in Spain to fabricate a kind of wonder-king, not, of course, on religious grounds, but on political grounds. And it was thus in Spain, in the twentieth century, that the last establishment, not restoration, of a monarchy in Western Europe took place.

In November 1975, by sovereign decision of Francisco Franco, the monarchy returned, in the person of [Juan Carlos I de Borbón y Borbón](#). Regarding the figure of the previous Head of State, any historian would, in my opinion, have to follow the message of Karl Marx to the letter in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, the least Marxist of all his works, when he stated that it was necessary to analyze "the circumstances and conditions that allow a mediocre and grotesque character to play the role of hero."

The elites of the regime, as well as the opposition, did not have excessive illusions about the monarchical sentiment of the Spanish. Only [José María Pemán](#) or [Luis María Ansón](#) - the inventor of "[Juan III](#)" - could believe, at that point, in something as esoteric as "the magic of royalty." For the majority of the right, Franco's will was enough. And in reality, no one was too shocked when Franco chose Juan Carlos as his successor and not his father [Juan de Borbón y Battemberg](#).

Juan Carlos himself did not hesitate to accept that decision, betraying not only his father, but the laws of dynastic succession. The truth is that he had no other alternative either. Based on this experience, the media, and later some court historians, began to manufacture the figure of the thaumaturge king, a process not only risky, but very complicated given the characteristics of the person in question.

Physically, Juan Carlos was handsome enough, dashing, young, even with a good face. However, his character could not bear a close-up. He was shy; and as a speaker, a disaster - as eloquent as a no-trespassing sign. Nor did the man stand out for his intellectual or scientific curiosity, although, yes, he was very athletic. His great obsessions were, as we have had the opportunity to see, money and sex.

With such meager strands, the image of a hearty, regenerating, sincerely democratic monarch was going to be woven, although, incidentally, it was never heard-said that the institution of the monarchy or its magistracy be submitted to a referendum. He would be the healer of all our social and political ailments - he was to be the author of the new "Spanish miracle." As the always timely and opportunistic [José María de Areilza](#) pointed out, the young king was going to be the "engine of change;" that is, the promoter of the transition to liberal democracy.

In essence, there was no other possibility. The process of change to liberal democracy has often been, and continues to be, mythologized, almost in providential terms. As a historian I am not a determinist, but I believe that, in certain cases, such as the one that concerns us, it is necessary to accept, as the always lucid [Raymond Aron](#) pointed out, the validity of a certain "probabilistic determinism," since the freedom of human choice always works within certain environments or restrictions received from the past.

Like it or not, Spain's destiny was liberal democracy; or, if you like, the party state. The economic development of the 1960s, the expansion of the middle classes and the qualified working classes, the political consequences of the [Second Vatican Council](#), the context of a liberal and social-democratic Europe, the emergence of the Common Market, the diplomatic and military influence of the United States - everything headed in that direction.

Of course, change can be made better or worse, depending on the context; but the path was laid out, in its general lines, beforehand. Franco knew it, as he told US General [Vernon Walters](#) in a conversation. Therefore, Juan Carlos I was impelled, whatever his inner convictions, if he had any, to the acceptance of liberal democracy, for lack of alternatives.

Given the contexts to which we have referred, the strange thing would have been the survival of the political regime born of the Spanish Civil War. The historical frame of reference for the new political system was, without a doubt, the [Canovist Restoration of 1874](#), Soldier King and bipartisanship included. And not only did Manuel Fraga want to play the role of [Cánovas](#) - his goal was the

progressive integration of the left and peripheral nationalists into the new political system. The exception was the Republican parties.

As in the case of the Restoration, the fundamental dogma was the monarchy, as a guarantee of social continuity. The behavior of the whole of the real left, [PSOE](#) and [PCE](#), and that of the nationalists - except for the [ETA](#) terrorists - consisted in taking advantage of the opportunities of the new situation. In reality, they were all advantages, since they achieved legality and great promises of social influence and political power.

In this sense, the young monarch's relations with the old communist leader [Santiago Carrillo](#) were especially unctuous, almost pornographic. Of course, one and the other were needed. The 1978 Constitution was the consecration of that pact. Significantly, no monarchical institution underwent a referendum - which, as [Professor Dalmacio Negro Pavón](#) has pointed out, did not resolve the monarchical question; it simply postponed it. And there are pasts that do not pass, as [Ernst Nolte](#) said.

The new party regime was configured, in daily political practice, as a poorly representative political system, a mere partitocracy - the so-called State of the autonomies was established, which, as some denounced and later it would be seen, was and is a clear instrument of Spanish denationalization and economic waste. The left monopolized the sphere of cultural creation; and a kind of uncritical and superficial Eurofundamentalism hegemonized the social imaginary of the Spanish.

However, the figure of the monarch did not acquire authentic stability until his performance, or supposed performance, in the sad events of February 1981. And it is that when these lines are written we still do not really know what was the true role of the monarch in the gestation and the subsequent failure of the coup attempts that occurred on 23-F. As [Gonzalo Fernández de la Mora](#) said, the truth would perhaps be known on the day of the trial. At the Final Judgment, it will be finally understood.

Unsurprisingly, the blame fell on the so-called "extreme right," which did not learn anything. In any case, the monarch, in the interest of the political, economic and media classes, consolidated his image and his role in the new situation. He was the defender of democracy; or, as [Herrero de Miñón](#) said, the defender of the Constitution. The idea, by the way, was [Carl Schmitt's](#). As a soldier-king he had managed to control the Armed Forces.

Of course, it must also be said, in case there were any doubts, that what was consolidated then was the charisma of Juan Carlos I, not the monarchical institution. Since then, reference has always been made to "[Juan Carlismo](#)," not to the monarchism of the Spanish in general and the left in particular.

In reality, Juan Carlos himself knew that his permanence on the throne depended on the acquiescence of the left. If they, at a given moment, questioned his legitimacy, and from his perspective it was very easy for them to do so, he was lost. For this reason, he sympathized much more with the astute and folksy [Felipe González](#) than with the hirsute and unpleasant [José María Aznar](#); or, with the sinuous and elusive [Rodríguez Zapatero](#) who was with the rough and slow [Rajoy Brey](#).

To top it all, a sector of historiography did not hesitate to fall very low when it came to legitimizing its status. Such was the case, above all, of [Javier Tusell Gómez](#), and more tangentially of the mediocre and opportunist [Paul Preston](#). They both tried, and partly succeeded, in becoming court historians. Although, truth be told, more than historians, their image was more like that of [Hola](#) tabloid journalists. Next to them, [Jaime Peñafiel](#) looked like [Ranke](#). Both Tusell and the plump Britisher made an effort to show that, in reality, Juan Carlos was never heir to Franco, but to his father Juan de Borbón; and that the restoration - beware of the concept, nothing neutral - of the monarchy was done against the General Franco and following his own dynastic logic.

Nobody believed it, of course, but both pseudo-historians gained notoriety, influence, and money. The press and all the mass media were complicit, not only in the mythologizing of the character, but in the concealment of Juan Carlos's stormy private life and, above all, of his businesses and his relationships with characters of dubious morality. Looking for an antithesis to such a character, we have the ascetic [Baldwin of Belgium](#).

Despite his Catholic status, Juan Carlos never made the slightest gesture against abortion laws; and he did not hesitate to sign the [Historical Memory Law](#), which actually delegitimized his historical rank and that of the institution he embodied. And it is that in essence it supposed a mythification of the Second Republic. Apparently, nobody found out about it.

On the other hand, his role as constitutional king has been completely inoperative. It has neither stopped local separatisms, nor mediated between the parties, nor has it been a guarantor of the division of powers. After the entry of Spain into NATO, the figure of the king-soldier has lost much of its functionality. As [Juan Vázquez de Mella](#) would have said, he was "*el Augusto Cero*" ("Augusto Zero") or

"*el Rey-Poste*" ("the Post-King").

However, the monarch has been very effective when it comes to living the high life and increasing his personal fortune, as we learn from some media. Little by little, his figure has been destroyed. It had become a broken toy. The real taboo was gradually diluted. Juancarlismo stopped being operative. His perceptible physical decline, his continuous and ostentatious conjugal infidelities, his little transparent businesses, and his lack of interest in public affairs, contributed to making him a character in the [Valleinclanesque](#) *Ruedo Ibérico* [*The Iberian Bullring, a series of novels written by Ramón María del Valle-Inclán, in which distortion - [esperanto](#) - is used. Trans.*].

All of this culminated in the [pathetic photo](#) from Botswana. Juan Carlos had killed Dumbo; quite the symbol. His forced and necessary abdication was in character - a capricious, disloyal, impulsive, incompetent man when trying to control the economic corruption of his family; a frivolous man. His legacy is a hindrance to his current heir, [Felipe VI](#), and for the dynasty itself. As Louis XV said, "After me, the flood." We are in it.

What Spain did Juan Carlos I leave us? Perhaps the best thing would be to leave the answer to that question to a poet; and the exalted [Luis Alberto de Cuenca](#) said it best: Spain has become "a very sad place that has forbidden heroes, has allowed the roses of scandal to rot... a poor place that has lost its soul without gaining anything in return, a place without a future, a fistful of disunited and sterile land."

Unlike his father, Felipe VI has nothing to offer to the left and the nationalists. Separatism no longer hides its unattractive face; it wants an independent Republic. And one part of the left, especially in the new generations, rejects the monarchy, whose meaning they do not understand and who prefer the Republic, which is not difficult to understand because, as we have already pointed out, the stability of the institution rested on the charisma of Juan Carlos I and in the myth of the Wonder King, which the King himself has been in charge of destroying. And charisma is not inherited. Nobody has taught young people what the monarchy consists of, its functionality or its advantages; perhaps because in the 21st century all this is already anachronistic. Instead, the benefits of the Second Republic have been sung to them.

We already know where the left will go. And the right? So far, they have supported the young monarch. However, it is not hidden from us that a sector of the right does not forgive Juan Carlos for his marriage with the left and his support for the state of autonomies. And Felipe VI has not had the opportunity to

build his own charisma. And he probably never will.

Stance Of A Heterodox Conservative

In March 2014, I was invited to a lunch at [La Gran Peña](#), in which, after the meal, the guest gave his opinion on a current issue, which was then discussed. The issue was whether Juan Carlos, after the Botswana crisis, should abdicate as a show of exemplariness. Among those attending the event were [Leandro de Borbón](#), [Fernando Suárez](#), [General Armando Marchante](#), [Ángel Maestro](#), [Enrique de Aguinaga](#) and some others that I do not remember.

In the background, a statue of [Alfonso XIII](#). A monarchical, conservative and Francoist auditorium. Now, I not only defended the abdication of the monarch, but the need to raise debate on the viability of a presidential republic. They jumped on me. "Without the monarchy we will go to civil war," Leandro de Borbón shouted. Others discussed my ideas vehemently. The most eloquent was Fernando Suárez, who defended Juan Carlos I and the monarchy. Most left without speaking to me.

A few months later the monarch abdicated. Yesterday we learned of his departure from Spain. Serious historical error. A convinced monarchist like [Tom Burns Marañón](#) predicts, in [Expansión](#), the next advent of the Third Republic. All of this demonstrates the great fragility of the institution. In any case, it is more than evident that the right wing, for the most part, has a real fear of the Republic.

Lately it has been tried to manufacture a charisma for Felipe VI. His speech of October 3 could be, without a doubt, the foundation of that charisma, but it lacked real support and continuity over time. Soon they clipped his wings. And the speech was badly received by a sector of the left. The chubby Paul Preston, a lousy historian, but an influential actor paid for by Catalan separatism, claimed that it could have been written by Mariano Rajoy.

The subsequent speeches of Felipe VI have already been diffuse, accommodating, paternalistic, without precise content. The fact is that the institution lacks autonomy and cannot become a "party." In his travels and appearances, he is seen isolated, without support.

The [Pedro Sánchez](#) government follows a path diametrically opposed to the content of the actual speech of October 3, 2017. The flight of his father does not favor Felipe in the medium term either. And

we must not forget that their fate depends on the opinion of the left. A [García Ferreras](#) campaign in [La Sexta](#) could ruin the institution in weeks.

In February 2014, a manifesto of leftist intellectuals calling for the Third Republic was made public. Among the signatories were spoiled brats of the current regime, such as, [José Caballero Bonald](#), [José Luis Abellán](#), [Ángel Viñas](#), [Josep Fontana](#), [Juan Genovés](#) or [Nicolás Sánchez Albornoz](#).

Is A Republican Right Possible?

Of course, I do not pretend that the whole of the right will convert to republicanism. It would be petulant on my part, since I have no influence in those sectors. I have always been a heterodox conservative. Another thing is that the political, social and mental tendencies of Spanish society go against the monarchy. We are a country of deep social and economic inequalities, but very egalitarian in mentality. "Nobody is more than nobody," they say. Nobody has taught the youth to be monarchist, or, at least, to respect the institution. And the most rebellious express their dissent by waving a flag of the tacky Second Republic.

In this context, I believe that a sector of the right, necessarily a minority, should defend, in the face of the gale that is coming upon us, the alternative of a presidential republic, compared to the federal or plurinational republic of the left. A presidential model, in which the supreme magistracy of the State comes from the popular election. Its source of democratic legitimacy is relatively direct. For this reason, even if he is a candidate nominated by the parties, once a president comes to power, he is freed from party discipline and a certain independence can be expected from him. Furthermore, by having a full territorial base, it could annul local separatisms and maintain national unity.

This presidentialism can ensure the independence between the legislature and the executive; and, in addition, it has historically been shown capable of limiting the interference of both in the judiciary. It also eliminates government instability and weak coalition cabinets, sometimes subordinate to a tiny minority. In a presidential Republic, the Head of State can actually perform an arbitration function between the parties, and has the advantage that, at the end of his term, the arbitration returns to the electoral roll - what cannot happen with the monarchy.

The negative management of the republican Head of State does not generally affect the institution

itself, since at the end of his mandate the same condition that united him to the Head of State also disappears. The same does not happen under the monarchical regime, where any disputed action, and not only public, of the King or his family negatively affects the institution.

Moderation is, in short, a way of committing oneself, albeit slightly, and that entails a wear-and-tear that, in general, constitutional monarchs tend to avoid. In this sense, the Spanish case is archetypal. The King does not rule. Your legal actions are not valid, if they are not endorsed by one of your ministers; and you are not even subject to liability.

Only the moderator function remains. But make no mistake: the Monarch neither intervenes nor moderates. When has a Monarch mediated a conflict between the three powers? He has never done it; he cannot do it; and the Monarch himself knows that he never will do it. This is the message that, in my opinion, should be transmitted to the most critical, active and right-wing sectors. As the great Charles de Gaulle said, a project that would open "the horizon of a great undertaking." And I will not say more – otherwise they will incinerate me.

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The [image](#) shows a portrait of King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia, by Ricardo Sanz.

