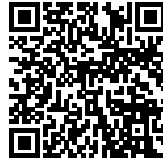


POLITICIAN-POET JOSÉ ANTONIO PRIMO DE RIVERA

Posted on June 1, 2023 by Javier Ruiz Portella



"We are going to defend our flag joyfully, poetically, by raising it. Because there are some who believe that in order to unite the will... it is necessary to hide everything that can arouse emotion or point out an energetic and extreme attitude. What a mistake!"

The flag that José Antonio Primo de Rivera wanted to raise was obviously a political flag. Raising it, he added: "People have never been moved by anything but poets, and woe betide anyone who does not know how to raise, against the poetry that destroys, the poetry that promises."

Never had such words—the conjunction of the poetic and the political—resounded with such force in the public arena. Similar things had not even been heard in those times—Greek *polis*, Roman *res publica*, monarchy of divine right— in which a kind of sacred breath breathed in the political.

But today? Today, when political life has become a prosaic affair of merchants? Today, the above words—they were pronounced on October 29, 1933 at the founding ceremony of Spanish Falange—sound to our modern ears as outlandish as they are bizarre; and this despite the fact, perhaps someone will add, that they are aesthetically very beautiful. How nice they sound, it must be said! How well-spoken he was! And as handsome, the poor man, as he was! Et cetera.

The Conciliation of Opposites

The conjunction of the poetic and the political—the pretension of mobilizing the masses by invoking a poetic or spiritual spirit—constitutes, it is true, a contradiction in terms.

What happens is that there are contradictions upon contradictions. There are, on the one hand, the disastrous contradictions, the senseless nonsense. And there is, on the other hand, the Great Contradiction—"the embrace of opposites," I usually call it—which, as Heraclitus already knew, moves the world and life, that life that would never exist without being spurred on by death; or that order of the intelligible that would never exist without being intertwined with that of the sensitive or emotional.

There, in that embrace of opposites, is where the conjunction of the political and the poetic is situated: in the combat that, necessarily mired in the mud of the public arena, is driven by a poetic or spiritual yearning.

What is this Yearning? What is this Struggle?

It is a yearning and a struggle - the very essence of the Jose-Antonian project—in which two contradictory terms are intertwined: revolution and conservation. The revolution that leads to a break with the old, retrograde conception of the world, while at the same time conserving all that, from tradition, it is imperative to conserve.

But what, concretely, do such a revolution and such conservation consist of?

What we must break with, advocates José Antonio, is the flagrant social injustices of liberal-capitalism (not, of course, to replace them with the much worse injustices of socialism). But what we must also put an end to is the decomposition of things, with the loss of their sap or substance—that consequence of individualism and materialism that lead, he wrote, "not to death by catastrophe, but to a stagnation in an existence without grace or hope, where all collective attitudes are born puny... and the life of the community is flattened, hindered, sinks in bad taste and mediocrity."

Faced with this mediocre and puny life, what is needed is to raise the poetic breath, to unfold the spiritual rebirth of a world governed in our days by exclusive material desires and presided over by an equality and freedoms that, contrary to what his enemies claim, José Antonio did not reject at all. On the contrary, regretting their merely formal character, he seeks to revitalize them, to endow them with authentic meaning and content.

That is why he wrote: "Reader, if you live in a liberal state, try to be a millionaire, and handsome, and smart, and strong. Then, yes... life is yours. You will have publications in which to exercise your freedom of thought, automobiles in which to put into practice your freedom of locomotion." If you don't have them, if you are not at the heart of economic power, you will be left in the gutter.

The Nation

And, intertwined with all this, Spain, the Nation: that "unity of destiny."

The Nation, the Homeland—the pillar of that substantial, organic order for which José Antonio

advocated and which is at the antipodes of what Zygmunt Bauman calls "liquid modernity."

The Nation, the Homeland—the place of tradition, of origins, of destiny. Of all that without which we would be nothing and without which we would speak nothing.

The Nation, history, tradition—that incandescent lava that unfolds over the centuries, linking the living with the dead and projecting them towards those to come.

The Nation—the very negation of narrow-minded, sullen, uncouth nationalism, just as the Fatherland, understood as it should be, represents the negation of tawdry, flat, chauvinistic patriotism.

The Nation—that unity of destiny that is opposed to the "terroir," whose provincial narrow-mindedness José Antonio fought against.

And What about Francoism in all This?

What has all this to do with the Regime established after the victory of the national side in the Spanish Civil War? Francoism turned José Antonio into a saint and took the Falange to the altars; but its ideals had little to do with the reality of that prosaic and gray Regime, increasingly bourgeois, and which was so far from the poetic breath that "moves the people."

What could the "cheerful and flirtatious Spain" defended by José Antonio, and the prudish Spain of demure skirts and prissy behaviors encouraged from the pulpits have in common? Except for outward appearances, except for that paraphernalia of belts, squads and blue shirts, very little; almost nothing had they to do with each other. The two had nothing in common.

(Is there no experience that, embodied in reality, allows us to relate it to the ideals of José Antonio? Yes, there are two. The first is the one [undertaken by the great poet Gabriele D'Annunzio](#) when he conquered in September 1919 the unredeemed Italian (today Croatian) city of Fiume. During the fifteen months that followed the most innovative of political, cultural and vital experiences, the Poet-Commander and his brave Arditi (the Daredevils) launched themselves, together with the population of the city, into a fascinating right-wing and libertarian, nationalist and cosmopolitan adventure, until they

were defeated in December 1920.

The second historical reference is constituted by the so-called German Conservative Revolution, which, as its name indicates, consisted in joining, as José Antonio would do, the two opposing poles of tradition and revolution. Developed between 1918 and 1933, the German Conservative Revolution included thinkers and leaders of the stature of Oswald Spengler, the Jünger brothers, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Ernst von Salomon, Carl Schmitt, Heidegger, etc., not to mention its deep-rooted philosophical invocation of Nietzsche).

A fortnight before being shot, and while offering to try to bring about a cessation of hostilities between the two sides facing each other off to the death, José Antonio himself had intuited everything that separated him from the nascent Francoism. With schematic words—these were his notes to himself—but profound and harsh, he analyzed the social, political and ideological nature of those who had taken up arms.

"A group," he said, "of generals of desolate political mediocrity. Pure elementary clichés (order, pacification of the spirits).... Behind: 1) The old intransigent, narrow-minded, antipathetic Carlism. 2) The conservative classes, self-interested, short-sighted, lazy. 3) Agrarian and financial capitalism, that is to say... the lack of any far-reaching national sense."

The far-reaching national sense, the far-sightedness, the eagle-eyed gaze—this was what characterized the man who, in one of those miracles that only happen once every thousand years, combined two extraordinary traits: those of the seasoned fighter in fierce combat in the political arena, and those of the deep, subtle thinker dedicated to the great challenges of the spirit.

However, that miracle would not last long—about five years-. A burst of machine gun fire finished him off. The trigger was pulled by the same graverobbers who have believed, eighty-seven years later, to be able to erase the presence of José Antonio. A vain endeavor! They can do nothing against the presence and the memory of the only politician-poet, the only politician-philosopher in Spain's history.

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qu'un dieu pour nous sauver? (Is There No God to Save Us?). This article comes through the kind courtesy of [*EL Manifiesto*](#).

