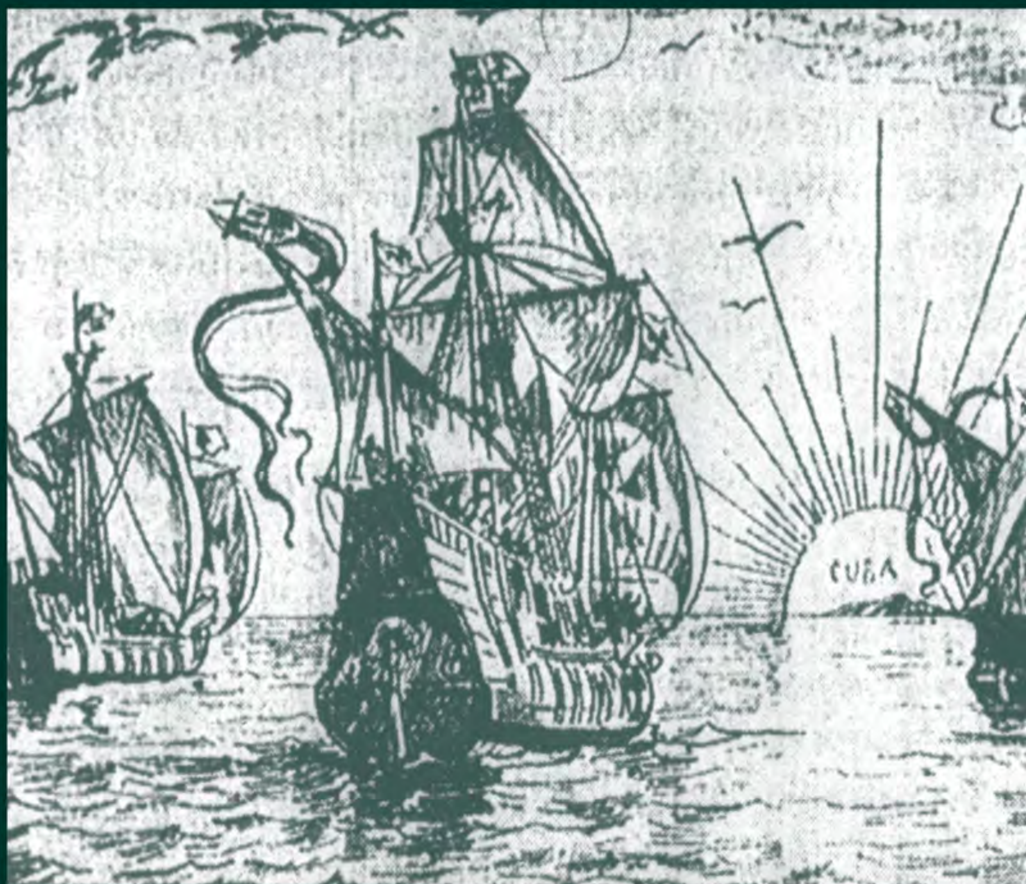
# Spain and the Mediterranean since 1898




Editor

RAANAN REIN

SPAIN AND THE MEDITERRANEAN SINCE 1898

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# Spain and the Mediterranean since 1898

*Edited by*

RAANAN REIN

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# Introduction

The year 1898 is considered a watershed in Spanish history, and some have even gone to the extreme of giving it the same weight as the pivotal 1492. The 1898 centennial, recently observed with various congresses and events, has further inflated the already extensive bibliography on the subject.[1] Yet, hyperbole aside, the military defeat Spain suffered at the hands of the United States did in fact mark, to a considerable extent, the beginning of a new era in Spanish history. The Disaster of 1898 had far-reaching repercussions on the Spanish political system. It helped undermine the constitutional monarchy, which functioned on the basis of a peaceful rotation of power between the two dominant parties. Even General Miguel Primo de Rivera, who seized power in September 1923, and General Francisco Franco, who led the Nationalist uprising against the Second Republic in July 1936 and ruled Spain as its dictator until November 1975, linked their own victories with the naval defeat at the end of the nineteenth century. The loss of Cuba, which had been the main market for Catalan industry, also sharpened criticism of Madrid and accelerated the development of Catalan nationalism.

Certainly the events of 1898 had powerful long-term consequences for Spain's position and role in the international system. The loss of the Caribbean islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico (in addition to Spain's defeat in the Philippines) meant the loss of the last vestiges of the Spanish empire in the New World. That immense enterprise, begun at the end of the fifteenth century, thus came to an end politically and militarily, although not culturally, at the end of the nineteenth century. From that time on, Spain focused its attention on the European arena, particularly the Mediterranean basin – a change of course that, according to the Spanish historian Salvador de Madariaga, represented a return to Spain's 'natural' foreign policy objectives, which had been sidetracked by the 'discovery' of the New World in 1492 and the accession to the Spanish throne of the Hapsburg King, Charles I.[2]

The ruling elites' inability to give up the imperial myth and the fact that the loss of the Spanish empire had come just at a time when other European powers were at the height of their colonial competition on the African continent encouraged Spain to try to carve out a mini-empire for itself in North Africa as compensation for losing its American dominions. As the historian David Woolman wrote,[3]

> National pride demanded that something be done to regain a certain measure of prestige. Where were there greater possibilities of glory

> than in Morocco? One had merely to look across the Straits of Gibraltar to see plainly the peaks of this unexploited land. The two presidios planted on its shores had been Spanish for over three hundred years; and moreover, the Spanish Army had easily won the recent brief military excursions. Now was surely the moment ... to rebuild the glory of Spain.

To Spain's rulers in the first third of the twentieth century, the Spanish presence in Morocco was essential if Spain was to enjoy any measure of prestige and influence in the international sphere. As the liberal Prime Minister of the time, Conde de Romanones, wrote in his memoirs, 'Morocco was for Spain her last chance to keep her position in the concert of Europe'.[4]

The rhetoric concerning Spain's special relationship with Spanish America continued throughout the twentieth century – particularly during periods when Spain's relations with the European powers were rocky – and served the efforts of various regimes to enhance their prestige at home and abroad. Whatever the regime, however – civilian or military, monarchic or republican, tyrannical or democratic – most of Spain's attention and resources now went to Europe and the Mediterranean countries. This tendency has grown stronger since Spain's admission to the European Community in 1986.

The present collection of articles examines diplomatic, strategic, economic, and cultural aspects of Spain's relations with the Mediterranean countries in the past 100 years. The opening essay, by Octavio Ruiz, analyses the difficulties, tensions, and internal contradictions that characterized Spanish society and politics at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth under the renewed reign of the Bourbons. That liberal monarchy's increasing difficulties with the challenges of urbanization and industrialization and the resulting acceleration of social radicalization and pressures for political democratization all contributed to the institution of the military dictatorship in 1923.

Fernando García Sanz's article studies the relations between Spain and Italy from the end of the last century up until 1922, when the Fascists took power in Rome. It shows how economic ties between the two countries were hampered by competition for the same agricultural markets in Europe and by conflicting interests in North Africa, particularly with respect to France. Decision makers in Rome and Madrid always hoped that their counterparts would help maintain the balance of power in the Mediterranean by curbing French aspirations in North Africa without becoming too friendly with Paris.

Susana Sueiro shows how Primo de Rivera, Spain's dictator from 1923 to 1930, managed to end the Rif war, which, encouraging political and social ferment on the Iberian Peninsula, had been something of a nightmare for the constitutional government that had preceded the dictatorship. The article assesses Primo de Rivera's achievement in the context of the struggle among the European powers, which sought to maintain their influence in the western Mediterranean in general and in North Africa in particular.

The Second Republic, established in Spain after the fall of the dictatorship, had trouble implementing the new, different foreign policy it envisioned both because it was busy coping with the internal political problems that plagued its short life (1931–36) and because its rule coincided with a world economic depression and growing tension in the international sphere. Nuria Tabanera García focuses on the principal points of reference for the Republic's foreign policy, namely the League of Nations and the Anglo-French axis. The Republican leaders' primary concern was to maintain stability in the western Mediterranean at a time when the collective system of security was falling apart. The same concern has led Spain to participate in successive regional efforts to draw up a 'Mediterranean pact'.

Shannon E. Fleming discusses the evolution of the Second Republic's colonial policies in Spanish Morocco from April 1931 to July 1936. He argues that despite the frequent administrative and personnel changes in the protectorate during this period, the Second Republic's policies remained fairly consistent. They included most notably a commitment to the colonial ethos, the replacement of the military administration with a civil one, and continuing efforts to isolate the protectorate from the political and social issues that engaged the Peninsula.

Stanley G. Payne provides a broad view of the ups and downs that characterized the relations between Rome and Madrid during Benito Mussolini's rule. The first phase of the relationship (1923–30) produced friendly ties between the two dictators, Mussolini and Primo de Rivera, but no decisive changes. During the second phase, under the Second Republic, relations were adversarial but Mussolini had no significant influence on Spanish affairs, which were a comparatively low priority for Italian diplomacy. The third phase encompassed the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), during which the Italian dictator provided more support to the Spanish Nationalists than Hitler did, both absolutely and proportionately. During the fourth phase, spanning most of World War II (1939–43), relations remained very close, though they were less significant than Spain's relations with Nazi Germany.

Ismael Saz's essay analyses Hispano-Italian relations during the second and third phases mentioned above. During the Second Republic, Mussolini tried to influence Spanish politics through a combination of diplomatic

activity and covert support for monarchist conspiracies. However, it was not until the outbreak of the Civil War that he became seriously involved in events on the Iberian Peninsula. Saz examines Mussolini's motives for intervention, which included his wish to block Communist influence and to eliminate the democratic challenge represented by the Republican government, as well as the desire to increase the regime's prestige at home and abroad as a means of achieving Italian hegemony in the Mediterranean.

The non-intervention policy adopted by France and Britain during the Civil War contributed to the Nationalists' overthrow of the Republic. Both countries were worried that events in Spain might drag them into an international war and therefore tried to remain aloof from the hostilities. Ricardo Miralles's article examines the diplomatic moves the Spanish Republic made to counteract the effects of this policy.

The Mediterranean as a scene of conflicted interests and naval battles is the subject of Michael Alpert's article. The Spanish Civil War came at a time when the British navy did not consider itself strong enough to fight Italy in the Mediterranean while continuing to defend Britain's widespread empire. Italy, however, was heavily rearming and resented Britain's refusal to respect Italian rights in the Mediterranean or to extend total recognition to Italy's conquest of Abyssinia. The Spanish Civil War gave Italy an opportunity to challenge the security of British and French sea routes and to undermine British power and prestige. Although Britain ultimately kept the Italian navy from dominating the entire Mediterranean, it could not break the Italians' control of the western part of the sea. The Spanish Republican fleet in the Mediterranean was unable to challenge the Nationalist insurgents or to blockade their ports, and the sea routes by which supplies and food were shipped to Republican Spain became increasingly hazardous. The USSR, now the Republic's sole friend, maintained no presence in the Mediterranean. By 1938, Nationalist warships strategically based at Palma (Majorca) and aided by German and Italian aircraft, had the Spanish Republic effectively blockaded, and they were to be an important factor in its defeat.

Norman J.W. Goda argues in his article that Spanish foreign policy during World War II must be understood within the context of Madrid's aims in the western Mediterranean, particularly in French Morocco. Although the Franco government had been unwilling to enter the European war when it erupted in 1939, it changed its policy when it saw France facing defeat by the Germans (in June 1940). Reluctant to subordinate Spanish aims to those of the Axis powers, Franco initially tried to obtain French colonial territory without consulting the Germans or the Italians by negotiating with the new Vichy regime. Only after this attempt failed did Madrid offer to enter the war on the Axis side, hoping in this way to gain

the territory it coveted. Hitler's competing aims in Northwest Africa, however, ultimately helped keep Spain out of the war.

At the end of World War II, Franco's regime found itself isolated in the international sphere and confronting profound economic distress at home. As a strategy for expanding trade and ending the diplomatic boycott imposed on it by the United Nations, Spain began to cultivate its relations with the Arab world. Raanan Rein examines Francoist Spain's systematic campaign to woo the Arab countries in the late 1940s and early 1950s, a campaign in which even the regime's failure to form diplomatic relations with the state of Israel became a vehicle for improving Spanish ties with the Arabs. However, Franco's hopes that displaying hostility towards the Jewish state and fostering political and economic ties with the Arab countries would allow him to maintain Spain's control over northern Morocco proved illusory.

The last two essays in this volume focus on the evolution of Spain's Mediterranean policy since 1986, when the country joined the European Community. Alfred Tovias emphasizes Spain's role in the European Union, especially with respect to Spanish policies concerning Mediterranean non-member countries. According to Tovias, these policies underwent a rapid change, shifting from an emphasis on unilateral trade preferences in favour of those countries to a focus on financial aid, reciprocal trade concessions, and such non-economic issues as political dialogue, cultural cooperation, and horizontal cooperation between non-governmental organizations. However, other European policies, such as the institution of a borderless Europe, have called upon Spain to serve as gatekeeper of the south in order to restrict the entry of immigrants from North Africa into the European Union labor market by way of Spain.

Antonio Marquina's essay concentrates on Spain's efforts to achieve stability in the Mediterranean by making the United States, the European Union, and NATO aware of security problems there. The Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Barcelona (November 1995) was one notable manifestation of such efforts.

All in all, this collection fills a vacuum in English-language historiography relating to Spain's international relations. In the past ten years important work has been done on this subject in Spain itself, where academic activity has been characterized by growing openness and vitality since Franco's death. It is therefore no wonder that about half of the contributors to this volume are Spaniards.

I should like to thank the editors of the *Mediterranean Historical Review*, Irad Malkin and Ron Barkai, for their support and encouragement; the authors of all the essays, particularly Stanley Payne for his advice and encouragement; and Lorenzo Delgado Gómez Escalonilla and Florentino

Portero for their help and goodwill. Finally, I should also like to thank Tal Agmon for the work put into producing this book and Barbara Metzger for her diligent copy-editing.

*Raanan Rein*

NOTES

1. According to Sebastian Balfour, '1898 looms almost as large in Spanish historiography as that other fateful and much more trumpeted year of 1492'. See Sebastian Balfour, *The End of the Spanish Empire, 1898–1923* (Oxford, 1997), p.v.
2. Cited in Gerie B. Bledsoe, 'Spanish Foreign Policy, 1898–1936', in J.W. Cortada (ed.), *Spain in the Twentieth-Century World* (Westport, CT, 1980), p.3.
3. David Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif: Abd el-Krim and the Rif Rebellion* (Stanford, 1967), p.35.
4. Cited in Raymond Carr, *Spain 1808–1975*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1982), p.518 n.2.

# Spain on the Threshold of a New Century: Society and Politics before and after the Disaster of 1898

OCTAVIO RUIZ

*The military defeat of Spain at the hands of the United States in July 1898 has always been a reference point in the collective memory of Spaniards. It goes far beyond the actual consequences – military, economic, colonial and political – of a disaster which, to anyone with a modicum of information, always seemed inevitable, given the extraordinary inequality between the opponents and the diplomatic isolation of Spain. In fact, historical writings of recent years agree that, apart from the enormous symbolic significance of the loss of the last colonies of a once-great empire, the effects of the war, both economic and political, were relatively limited. At the same time, one writer*[1] *has pointed out that, faithful to a tradition common to the European political culture of the time, the date 1898 was used as a rhetorical device to increase awareness of the need for a profound political transformation. French intellectuals had done the same after the defeat at Sedan in 1870. It is as well, therefore, to set out in greater detail the chronological framework of these reflections with which we shall try to develop the idea that the colonial disaster of 1898, far beyond its intrinsic importance, serves to illustrate the disorder from which the Spanish political system was suffering at the end of the nineteenth century and the subsequent attempts to transform it and adapt it to new demands.*

At the end of the nineteenth century Spain was still markedly agricultural in character, that being the occupation of two-thirds of the working population. This ratio had remained constant since the beginning of the century and, since the great majority of these agricultural workers were only hired hands and had very little job security, the most obvious result was a society with extraordinary inequalities in which the aristocratic ideals characteristic of the *ancien régime* prevailed. The country's large agricultural landowners came from the ranks of the Spanish nobility and continued to enjoy extraordinary prestige, as is attested by the almost 300 titles which were created in the last quarter of the century.

Although the years after 1875 – a period known in Spain as the *Restauración* (Restoration) – were years of moderate economic growth, on the whole that growth was insufficient to sustain a population which was also increasing moderately but steadily (from 16.6 to 18.6 million between 1877 and 1900). This meant that living conditions did not improve appreciably. This helps us to understand the reasons for the great wave of migration to Spanish-speaking American countries – it is calculated that more than one million left in the last 20 years of the century[2] – and the marked concentration of people in the main cities. The latter process, although far less important in actual numbers, would have powerful repercussions on the nature of the political system.

The main cities of the country expanded in the final years of the century, but those who came to the cities were, for the most part, illiterates who lacked professional training. However, the first timid steps towards industrialization meant that the cities would offer better wages and greater employment opportunities than the countryside. At the beginning of the twentieth century almost two-thirds of the total Spanish population were illiterate, and this made them extraordinarily dependent on those who had money or education. The situation was the same for the great majority of those who lived in small centres of population with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants as for those who had preferred the precarious way of life and the overcrowding suffered by the common people in the big cities. The most elementary education reached little more than half of Spanish children, and only a tiny proportion of those went on to secondary and higher-level studies, which were beyond the reach of the common people and of women. Gloria Giner de los Ríos, niece of Francisco Giner de los Ríos, who was one of the great educational reformers of modern Spain, had to pursue her secondary education in a Barcelona school sitting next to the teacher, since it was considered improper for her to share benches with boys. In fact, the first secondary school for girls was not set up until 1910.

In general, as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, Spanish society appeared to be a backward one in which, despite a marked process of urbanization, most of the population seemed to be confined to small, isolated centres to which it was difficult to bring advances in education and culture. This was a time of confident optimism which was, however, enjoyed by very few. The construction of a liberal state had been a slow process and had produced very limited results. The crisis at the end of the century could only point up those imbalances.

## A LIBERAL SETTING

Since the 1830s society had been trying to develop a form of political organization based on the principles of liberal ideology. The process had

been a faltering one, and the dysfunctions of the system had provoked years of political paralysis. These years (1868–74) had witnessed the overthrow of Queen Isabella II, the introduction of a constitutional monarchy with a new dynasty (that of the Italian Savoys), and the establishment of a republic in which experiments in federalism gave way to centralism presided over by the military. This collection of experiments, which Spanish historians call the *Sexenio Democrático,* had as its guiding theme the democratic principle of universal suffrage. However, as had happened in France in 1848, the experiment turned out to be premature, and practical difficulties inherent in converting country folk into city dwellers manifested themselves.

The *dénouement* of these years was brought about by means of a military insurrection which cleared the way for the return of the traditional Bourbon dynasty in the person of a young King, Alfonso XII, son of the deposed queen. It was the key event in the Spanish Restoration, a distant echo of what other European states had experienced since the defeat of Napoleon.

Spain's Metternich was Antonio Cánovas del Castillo (1828–97), a doctrinaire liberal of conservative background who had tried to devise formulas of consent which would open up the political game and allow changes of party in the formation of government. He had accumulated political experience in the years before the *Sexenio Democrático*, in which he had been minister several times, and he was sympathetic towards the Liberal Union, a moderate faction between the extreme conservatives and the liberal progressives. All this, as well as the deep sense of historical continuity gained from his studies of the decadence of the Spanish monarchy, led him to establish a political structure which united traditional interests with liberal political forms aimed at bringing about stability and consensus based on a constitutional monarchy. In order to do this, he solved the problem of sovereign authority, exercised jointly by the King and by the representatives of the nation, in accordance with what he called the internal constitution of the country. It was a question of ploughing the old furrow of Spanish history, to use his own expression, and the result would be, as has been pointed out by an expert on the period,[3] the most stable and lasting system in Spanish contemporary history.

Although political artifice dictated the construction of a national state based on traditional values, Cánovas was especially careful to separate the new regime from two institutions which could have threatened the credibility of a system affirming the primacy of secular and civil values: the army and the Roman Catholic Church.

## THE ARMY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The experience of the middle years of the nineteenth century had shown that the commitment of a large number of army chiefs of staff to the liberal cause

ended in a complete reversal of attitude. This reversal reached a point where the military stopped being the guarantors of liberal institutions and involved themselves – perhaps because of the weakness of civil society and, more specifically, the weakness of the political class – in political decisions which were imposed through insurrections. This had been the procedure which led to the overthrow of the Bourbon dynasty and, with it, the delegitimation of the first Spanish liberal system.

Cánovas looked for a way of neutralizing this militarism by stressing the role of the King as supreme commander of the army. As the new King was still an adolescent, it was an easy task to create the image of the soldier-king and his first appearances were on the battlefronts of the civil war then being waged against absolutist elements in some areas in the north of the country. These appearances were so successful that they led to the recreation of the soldier-king figure whenever another male heir acceded to the throne. However, this formula was not always effective in containing the danger inherent in the military interests which, in fact, all the male monarchs of this period exhibited. Referring to the display of such tastes by Alfonso XIII, Miguel de Unamuno sharply criticized tendencies which were evident from early on. In 1904, when the King had been little more than two years on the throne, he commented:[4] 'People are not amused to see him walking around forever dressed in the uniform of a field marshal.'

Relations between the Roman Catholic Church and liberal politicians were always very strained, and the church was forever thought to view favourably those political solutions which might lead to a restoration of the values of the *ancien régime*. These values were represented in Spain by the Carlists, who denied the legitimacy of the accession to the throne of Isabella II, daughter of Ferdinand VII, and supported the supposed right to accession of Don Carlos, his brother.

As in other European states, the church had emerged from the revolutionary turmoil of the early years of the nineteenth century in a stronger position and maintained intact its power to shape opinion, particularly in the small rural centres scattered throughout the country. At the end of the nineteenth century, ecclesiastical institutions exercised almost total control over matters of public welfare and had established a strong presence in the primary and secondary education system, having particular influence on the children of the better-off social classes.

## THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF *CANOVISM*

Cánova's achievements project were more apparent than real. His attempt to set up a civil political system was forced to suffer the humiliation of having to accept that it was a military coup which had initiated the Restoration.

Although such coups did not proliferate in the years which followed, with the passage of time it became ever clearer that the Spanish army was the victim of structural problems which made it ineffective while at the same time remaining a threat to the stability of the political system. The tensions at the end of the century were clear evidence of this.

As for the church, the relative integration of its leaders did not prevent the institution as a whole from demonstrating an almost congenital incapacity to assimilate liberal principles. Mutual distrust increased as the years went by, and the contemporary movements of clericalism and anti-clericalism were an essential element in the nature of the relationship between religion and politics from the moment the liberal system was initiated in Spain.

For all that, a willingness to contain the pressures that might be exerted by both the army and the church was evident from the very beginning. In early December 1874, when the restoration of the monarchy was only a possibility, the future King Alfonso XII published a manifesto signed – with some significance – at the British military academy of Sandhurst. In it he promised a civil society which would not – he also promised – mean any lack of consideration for traditional values as represented by the church or the army. He concluded: 'I will not cease to be a good Spaniard or, like all my predecessors, a good Catholic or, as a man of this century, a true liberal.'

The monarch with whom the Restoration started, Alfonso XII, was an adolescent of conservative upbringing. He had military and authoritarian inclinations, but these did not interfere with the respect he showed for the liberal ideas which the new regime was encouraging. Indeed, he collaborated quite sincerely with the steps being taken to broaden the political base of the system and helped to overcome the purely personal confrontations which lay at the root of these pressures.

The same could be said of his second wife, María Cristina of Hapsburg-Lorraine, who would succeed him as regent in 1885. She was an Archduchess of mature years who showed great care in the fulfilment of her constitutional duties, just as she had embraced the task of producing children with seriousness and dedication – the male heir, Alfonso XIII, would be born in 1886, after the death of his father. The figure of this widowed queen evokes direct parallels with Victoria.

## TO GOVERN IS TO COMPROMISE

The most significant feature of the new political structure was a constitution, enacted in June 1876. It was strongly conservative in origin but offered wide scope for forms of consensus because of its essentially open nature and because of the ambiguity of many of its formulations. The

recognition of many individual rights and the possibilities for their expansion brought it close to the democratic constitution of 1869.

The regime was a constitutional monarchy in which sovereignty was shared between the monarch and a two-chamber parliament (*Cortes*). 'The power to make laws', stipulated article 18 of the constitutional text, 'lies with the Cortes and with the King.' In any case, the text appeared to be directed more to the question of the exercise of sovereignty than to resolving the old question of where the ultimate basis of power actually lay.

The difficult question of the relations between Church and State, a touchstone for the credibility of the Spanish liberal system, required the introduction of article 11. This recognition of Roman Catholicism as the state religion and of its monopoly of public religious manifestations was tempered with a recognition of the tolerance due to the religious preferences of every citizen. 'No one in Spanish territory will be discriminated against for his religious opinions or for exercising his particular form of worship, except that respect is shown for Christian morality.'

This was not, of course, an unconditional recognition of religious freedom. However, once again, the constitutional text offered a step forward that might satisfy those, both within and outside Spain, who were anxiously awaiting a response to the old call for freedom of religious opinion. A visit to the present civil cemetery in Madrid is still extraordinarily revealing, for the names on the headstones represent the Spain which refused to accept the idea of a Catholic unity.

The constitution signified a renewal of the revolutionary path trodden in 1868. However, the democratic experience of the years that followed had permeated the political culture of many Spaniards, and the advances gained during the six democratic years remained in the programmes of the republican parties and more progressive liberal groupings. In setting up the constitutional framework, Cánovas left the door open for these achievements to be reincorporated into the system. 'This statesman from Málaga might well have spoken the words which Ganivet put into the mouth of his hero Pío Cid: "It was for me without question that a Restoration could not be complete if it did not accept something of what had been done during the period of non-legitimate government. To govern is to compromise."'[5]

## AN ENFORCED TWO-PARTY SYSTEM

One particularly effective way to make clear this willingness to compromise was the consolidation of a political system similar to the much-admired British one, that is, a system whereby various parties (but preferably only two) could peacefully succeed each other in government without having to pin their hopes of gaining access to power on insurrection or revolution.

This was something which the liberal Spanish regime had not achieved before the revolution of 1868.

In short, the intention was to ensure that the country could be governed. The parties which were integrated into the system had to continue with a political tradition whose normal area of existence was that of parliamentary life alone. It was impossible for party leaders to seek support from an electorate which could hardly ever be mobilized. The oligarchies which headed the parties had as their main objective access to government and, with it, access to the resources of the budget. With such resources they could set in motion a process which would assure them of victory in the elections. Then, with a safe parliamentary majority, they could establish a network of relationships which would guarantee them permanent power for as long as this support remained strong. Only the loss of this homogeneous support – the exhaustion of the situation – would make it appropriate for the monarch to consider passing the responsibility for government to the other party.

Large party organizations were not, therefore, needed, nor was there any need for an excessively complicated organizational structure. Party life was settled in parliament, and party supporters received sufficient news of what was happening from what was published in the newspapers. The press was, in fact, strongly politicized. Newspapers were read frequently in *casinos* – a type of political club – where they were freely passed from one person to another in spite of the heavy bar used to bind the pages together. Reading a particular newspaper was a clear indication of one's political leanings, and the novelist Benito Pérez Galdós repeatedly used the technique of identifying his characters according to which newspapers they carried under their arms. It did not, therefore, appear at all strange to find newspaper editors occupying the places of honour at assemblies of the political parties which their newspapers supported.

It is worth mentioning here that the press also offered one of the liveliest forums for political debate. Both professional politicians and intellectuals agreed on this. It was in the newspapers that it was easiest to appreciate the various elements of this debate and that attitudes less clearly formulated in the formal atmosphere of professional politics were more precisely expressed. In the case of Spain, this means that the press continues to be an essential reference source for historical research. Apart from the fact that many books were simply compilations of what had previously appeared in the newspapers, it is only by consulting the latter that one can gain an exact picture of the conditions leading to the adoption of particular positions.

## THE CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL PARTIES

To achieve the desired alternation of the parties in government, Cánovas counted on placing his own party, a party composed of the most conciliatory

elements of the old moderate party, in the most moderate area of the political spectrum. These were elements that originated in what was called the 'puritan' sector, went on to the *Unión Liberal*, and ended up as members of what had been the conservative liberal opposition in the Cortes elected in 1869.

Although the majority of those conservative liberals had taken part in political life during the reign of Isabella II, they also accepted the 1869 constitution, just as they had proved willing to collaborate during the monarchist experiment of the brief reign of Amadeus I (1871–73). The failure of this experiment, culminating in political isolation during the republican period which followed (1873–74), led them to place their hopes in a restoration of the Bourbon dynasty in the person of the crown prince, who would have to rely heavily upon strong parliamentary support. In this sense, the insurrection of General Arsenio Martínez Campos on 29 December 1874, which set in motion the process leading to the Restoration, seemed initially to be a reversal, since, yet again, it seemed to rely on the power of the army. And there were many who thought that this insurrection made possible a return to the situation which obtained before the revolution, true to the traditional counter-revolutionary mentality of those who had forgotten nothing and learned nothing.

Cánovas, however, did not accept this interpretation and his Conservative Liberal – or simply Conservative – Party became the voice of those with integrative attitudes, who were channelling their efforts towards making alternate succession easy. Their political actions showed a high degree of pragmatism, which their rivals sometimes condemned as mere opportunism. This pragmatism made possible successes such as that of the incorporation into their party in 1884 of Alejandro Pidal y Mon (1846–1913), who headed the neo-Catholic sector pledged to bring about the Roman Catholic unity of Spain. This was the Spanish version of the 'rallying' of Catholics to the liberal regime inspired by Pope Leo XIII, and which entailed, in the Spanish case, the neutralization of the Carlists, who had already provoked two civil wars in their eagerness to impose an absolutist dynastic solution.

The alternate succession of two major parties became possible with the final consolidation of the Liberal Fusionist Party – or simply Liberal Party – in which a great many of the scattered leading supporters of the system during the *Sexenio Democrático* found a home. The process was a complex and detailed one and could not be considered complete until the second half of the 1880s.

An outstanding role in the success of this enterprise was played by the pragmatism of Práxedes Mateo Sagasta (1825–1903), a highly experienced politician who had encouraged the founding of the Constitutional Party in

1871. His capacity for compromise was enormous and he allowed elements from the old liberal progressive party and from the Constitutional Party of the *Sexenio Democrático* to join the Liberal Party. These were later to be joined by elements of the Dynastic Left, among whom figured the old radicals of the former democratic period. All of these set their political sights initially on the reinstatement of the 1869 constitution, with its individual political freedoms, although ultimately they would come to accept the 1876 constitution.

Although there were many similarities in the way the two major parties functioned and despite the fact that their programmatic differences were very slight, they reflected widely differing traditions of Spanish liberalism. Stability and alternate succession were achieved at the expense of representing popular interests, and the names of Cánovas and Sagasta became symbolic of the functioning of the system.[6]

## OUTSIDERS TO THE SYSTEM

Outside the system were the supporters of the *ancien régime* monarchy (Carlists) and those who rejected the monarchic state (republicans). There were also some small labour movements determined to bring about profound social transformation as a first step towards some kind of political change. Without the shadow of a doubt, the solidest of these groups was the Carlists, who had emerged from a dynastic dispute over the legitimacy of female succession to the throne which had led to confrontation between supporters of liberalism and those who defended the *ancien régime*. The strength of the Carlists lay in the popular support they enjoyed and the complicity of a large part of the Catholic clergy, who saw them as a possible way of bringing about Catholic unity in Spain.

At the beginning of the Restoration, the Carlists conducted an intense debate over the advisability of integration into the system as opposed to withdrawal until a very considerable sector of their possible support, that of the Catholic fundamentalists, decided to join Cánovas' party at the end of the 1880s. Although this did not harm Carlist politics definitively, it took away from them the sole right to represent Catholics politically. It also dispelled the spectre of a Carlist triumph, whether by insurrection or by the weight of votes when universal suffrage was implemented.

Throughout those years the republicans were almost like fossils, living proof of a past political experiment which no-one wanted to see return. The precautions necessary for the exercise of many individual rights and the distrust fomented by France's Third Republic forced them initially into a policy of mere survival, where very few placed any trust in a popular uprising or a military coup. From the beginning of the 1880s, in any case,

and increasingly as the liberals strengthened their ties with the left, the republicans began to find room for themselves in the new situation and even benefited from corrupt practices within the system. The result of this was that, although they never lost their established reputation for having rejected institutional monarchy, they never constituted a true and effective political opposition. As for Alejandro Lerroux, a rising figure in intersecular republicanism, a writer of the time had no hesitation in representing him as a tamed lion who always roared magnificently at his master's command. Example after example leads us to the conclusion that republicanism entered the new century without offering a true alternative to the political system.

It was also impossible to find that alternative among the labour movements, which had to face extraordinary obstacles to their organization. All this was in addition to the fact that it was difficult for them to get on with the working classes, whose rough-and-ready political culture was often more receptive to republican political speeches. At the end of the century, socialist membership was negligible, while the anarchists, forced underground, devoted most of their efforts to terrorist attacks and to proving themselves innocent of the attacks falsely attributed to them by the police.

## ELECTORAL GERRYMANDERING

In practice, the efficiency of the system would be related to a great extent to its ability to meet society's demands and especially to the methods of selecting the political class, which in turn depended on various electoral procedures. The need to consolidate power when public opinion was non-existent led the political class to take a very active part in the electoral processes and to practise all possible kinds of corruption.

As political succession could not be based on the decisions of a public opinion which did not exist, the system had to create substitute mechanisms, which reached as high as the monarch himself. It was he who had to decide the opportuneness of a political change which could not come about through a parliamentary defeat, given that every government in advance ensured a parliamentary majority great enough to guarantee its survival as long as there were no deep divisions at the heart of this majority. Once the other political party was charged with the formation of a government, the first task of the new team was to call for new elections, which had to produce the parliamentary majority necessary for smooth government.

There was no true electoral body, nor had there been one during the previous experiment of the *Sexenio Democrático*, and the political leaders had no option but to feign its existence in order to legitimate the changes in government. It fell to the Minister of the Interior to select a number of

deputies, who would have to be elected by a series of districts which were totally obedient to the government, whatever party was in power. This list was known as the *encasillado*. But the electoral contest was also very limited in most of the other districts in which the name of the candidate was thrown up as a result of negotiation between the government and prominent local political personalities (*caciques*). The situation, of course, changed over the years, and it was clear to everyone that, as society matured, the practice of electoral corruption would cease to be a mere substitution device to offset the lack of citizens who could vote, and become a straightforward abuse of power.

Although universal suffrage had been established by decree in November 1868, the political weariness which made the triumph of the Restoration possible also made it easy for Cánovas to re-establish limited suffrage – limited to those registered and eligible to vote – by means of the electoral law of December 1878. This gave the right to vote to only one out of five adult male Spaniards. This law also incorporated a few significant modifications to the traditional system of one-candidate districts. Some multi-candidate districts were allowed in urban areas and it became acceptable for some parliamentary seats to be allotted by means of an accumulation of votes for the same candidate in different districts.

Far more important was the reintroduction of universal male suffrage in June 1890. Although the territorial division of the districts remained unchanged, the electoral roll multiplied six-fold, and this produced a notable effect in the cities. In any case, the Spanish parliament continued to bear a strongly agrarian stamp, since rural districts accounted for more than 70 per cent of parliamentary seats. This law did not demand serious transformation in the political parties, nor did it change the sociological profile of members of parliament in subsequent years. The electoral practices continued unchanged, and it could be said that corruption and arbitrariness undermined the credibility of the system in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SYSTEM

References to corruption and to political fictions do not, however, mean that the political system was a failure. On the contrary, it had been capable, during the first quarter-century of its operation, of ensuring a stability which was translated into a longing for survival, as shown by the degree of harmony between the monarchist parties, which had been ferociously opposed before 1868. Further proof of this desire for continuity was the widening of the political spectrum through the legalization, in the 1880s, of all the political groupings outside the system, from the Catholic

fundamentalists to the anarchists. Liberal values were widely shared in end-of-century Spain, while traditional and conservative attitudes, despite being strongly supported in the Catholic world, had moved to a marginal position, along with organizations which tried to mobilize the working classes.

At the same time, the desire for peace was satisfied when the civil wars which had devastated the country at the beginning of the Restoration were ended by the establishment of a strong law-making force and the recognition of basic freedoms in the Law of Freedom of Association of 1887 and the Electoral Law of 1890. Not without reason, as a law historian has pointed out, do declarations of rights, constitutions, and codes of laws constitute the backbone of the bourgeois liberal world.[7]

It is possible that these formal extensions of democracy did not substantially affect the system and, for that reason, could not have contributed to its effective transformation. José María Jover pointed out some time ago[8] that one of the characteristics of contemporary Spanish history is the unusual durability of the moderate state and the durability of 'facades of power' which concealed archaic political structures. The crisis of 1898, in any case, did not reveal anything new, but rather pointed up some deficit which made the need for regeneration (to use a catch-word of those times) particularly urgent.

## THE DISASTER: A TIME FOR RHETORIC

The immediate circumstances of the crisis were a result of the rapid ending of the Spanish–American War of 1898, which culminated in an unavoidable defeat. The events were the predictable outcome of a colonial situation in which the peak of Cuban nationalism combined with the intense penetration of the island by American capital. In reality, Cuba had entered the sphere of influence of the American economy and Spanish interests had no place to hide except in nationalist rhetoric and the defence at all costs of colonial pride.

At the same time as American sympathy was warming towards the independence-seeking Cubans who had revived the war in 1895, the fragility of the Spanish position and the diplomatic isolation in which the country found itself, were becoming ever more apparent. The concentration of more than 200,000 Spanish soldiers on the island did not significantly alter the look of things. Spain had no option but to speed up the process of autonomy or accept certain defeat.

Strictly speaking, the war was over in less than three months in the Philippines and Cuba, and the annihilation of the Spanish fleet made it very clear that any resistance offered by the army would be useless. Talks began at the peace conference in Paris in the second half of October and less than

two months later Spain had to sign a peace treaty bowing to the American demands. It lost all the colonies related to the conflict and was obliged to pay compensation and to honour all existing economic agreements. The least sign of a defeatist attitude previously would have brought the threat of revolution to the mother country, which is why many historians have viewed the war, which was very short-lived, as a defeat both assumed and calculated.

The defeat, in any case, opened the vein of rhetoric in a country that had already spent many years listening to the so-called *literatura de la regeneración* (literature of regeneration). Before the Spanish–American War had even started, Unamuno had referred to the impact that the defeat at Sedan had had on French politicians: 'The thrashing inflicted in '70 was like a shower which made the corruptions of the Second Empire break out and then wither. It had a similar effect to that of the French invasion on us.'[9] The events of 1898 therefore offered a new opportunity to build an argument for reconstruction, although the defeat had already been rationalized by the ruling classes and had come as no surprise to them. However, the movement in favour of regeneration noted how pens were being filled for the task of describing the nation's ills. To this end, perhaps no one made such explosive statements as Joaquín Costa (1846–1911), a self-made man and an extraordinarily vigorous publicist. It was he who put into circulation the expression '*oligarquía y caciquismo*', and his role as spiritual mentor for many intellectuals of the time is very clear.[10]

However, this literature of regeneration usually contained an important anti-liberal and anti-parliamentary element which the defeat only served to increase. It reached the point that Spanish political culture came to include the concept of the providential emergence of a leader who, invested with special authority, would impose the measures necessary for reform. These authoritarian appeals, which were not unlike the intellectual currents running throughout Europe at the time, represented an invitation to dictatorship. Many judged this to be disastrous for a society deeply in need of creating a new social morality. José Ortega y Gasset refers to this danger in a letter to Miguel de Unamuno in January 1904:[11]

> One of the honourable deeds that must be done in Spain, where all foundations are lacking, is to banish, to prune from the collective soul the expectation of the genius who will appear like a manifestation of the spirit of the national lottery and to encourage the steady and measured footsteps of talent. Were we France, we would be talking of another deed. I prefer for my homeland the work of a hundred men of average intelligence, but honourable and tenacious, to the appearance of this genius, this Napoleon for whom we are waiting.

## LIMITED ECONOMIC EFFECTS

It is a commonly accepted view that the loss of the colonies did not cause Spain any great economic loss. The Cuban economy had been drawn into the orbit of the US economy many years before and the importance of the Philippines for the metropolis was very slight.[12]

Commercial relations with Cuba had, in fact, been declining throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, while at the same time the Spanish foreign sector was going through a process of reorienting its markets, particularly towards Europe. This helps to explain why the loss of the colonies had little impact on the principal economic order and, of course, was in no way similar to the bankruptcy that struck the economy and the public treasury with the emancipation of the South and Central American colonies at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The Spanish foreign sector showed signs of recovering quickly, and the interests of Spanish subjects in the former colonies hardly suffered at all from the defeat. Most companies continued in business without being affected in any way, and the flow of emigrants from the Spanish mainland picked up again with unusual speed. Capital flowed into the Spanish financial system and led to the creation of some of the banks (Vizcaya and Hispano Americano) which have been most important in Spanish life in the present century.

Although its impact was very limited in strictly economic terms, it is possible that the defeat contributed to the strengthening of a nationalist perspective reasoning which accentuated the projectionist and autarchic trends in some quarters, thus distancing Spain from liberal European economies.

## NEW LEADERS

In order to understand Spain after the Disaster one must take another factor into account. In the ten years following 1898 there was a notable series of changes in political leadership which radically transformed the appearance of the system. Cánovas del Castillo was assassinated by an anarchist in August 1897, and after him the following disappeared from the political scene: Emilio Castelar (1899), Francisco Pi y Margall (1901), Práxedes Mateo Sagasta (1903), Francisco Silvela (1905), Francisco Romero Robledo (1906) and Nicolás Salmerón (1908). All those who had set in motion the system of the Restoration vanished.

Of those who then moved into key positions one must, of course, single out the new King, Alfonso XIII, who acceded to the throne in May 1902. Once again, Spanish political life had as its central element an adolescent faced with a difficult task. It was difficult because of the calculated