

Possible Reigns in Spain

Stanley G. Payne

In July, 1974, Spain finally stood at the threshold of the momentous political transition that many had hoped for and just as many had feared for at least thirty years. An attack of phlebitis placed the life of the eighty-one-year-old Generalissimo Francisco Franco in grave danger and forced him, for the first time, to relinquish the powers of chief of state, which were temporarily transferred to his chosen successor, Prince Juan Carlos de Borbón, who will presumably soon become king of Spain, in any event.

Yet once again the crusty old general cheated fate, for he soon made a reasonable recovery and resumed the powers of government. Franco has made a career of beating the odds, starting with his combat career as a junior officer in the former Spanish Protectorate of Morocco. Through years of active service that saw the death of many of his closest colleagues, a severe abdominal wound in 1916, abrupt changes of political regime and professional fortune, leadership of an insurgent cause in a revolutionary civil war, isolation in Hitler's Europe, and ostracism in postwar allied Europe, Franco has shown a most remarkable capacity for survival. One of the favorite jokes in Madrid has long been the opening line of the Caudillo's hypothetical New Year's address to the people in the year 2000 that begins: "Spaniards, from my iron lung I greet you. . . ."

Yet all earthly things pass away, and the end of the seemingly indestructible Caudillo cannot be far off. For years he has suffered from Parkinson's disease; more significantly, since about 1968 he has undergone a progressive senility and slow deterioration. Though he still retains a degree of mental lucidity at least part of the time, he lacks energy

and stamina and is unable to devote much of the day to affairs of state. It would appear to be but a short time before the final fatality occurs.

Ever since the decline of Franco's health became evident in the late 1960's concern and speculation about the future of Spain has mounted. In 1969 Franco himself showed that he shared this concern when he finally appointed his successor in the person of the grandson of Spain's last king. Until recently, however, this growing awareness did not have the effect of rousing keen anticipation among the politically conscious in Spain. The regime has for the most part been quite successful in encouraging the depoliticization of Spanish society, refocusing common attention on the standard goals of consumerism and on the sort of hedonism common to latter-day Western society. An even more powerful reason was the fact that Franco had seemingly arranged things so that the immediate future of Spain could scarcely be different from its recent past. The key figure in the post-Franco transition was not so much Don Juan Carlos, who as the next head of state would in fact wield considerably less authority than Franco, but rather the "president of government," or prime minister, who would be in charge of the real business of government. Franco finally laid down the post of prime minister in June, 1973, only to appoint as new prime minister Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, long his righthand man and political alter ego. The pious, ultraconservative, personally scrupulous Carrero Blanco was considered "more Franquist than Franco," and the succession laws of the Franco regime so protected the incumbent prime minister that Juan Carlos would have found it difficult to remove him in the first few years after Franco's death. Carrero Blanco was thus the mechanism to guarantee the fundamental continuation of the Franquist system and its policies after the death of Franco.

This arrangement was nullified by the spectacular assassination of Carrero Blanco by terrorists of the

STANLEY G. PAYNE is Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and author of a half dozen books on Spanish history, including *The Spanish Revolution* (1970) and *A History of Spain and Portugal* (1973).

Basque revolutionary organization, ETA, on December 20, 1973. The elimination of Carrero was a blow aimed not so much against Franco as against the continuation of the regime after Franco. It fundamentally altered future calculations. Although the initial expectation among many was that the regime would take a defensive, repressive turn farther toward the right, such has not been the case.

In December, 1973, as on every major occasion since October, 1936, the basic decision was made by Franco. A constitutional organism, the Council of the Realm, already existed for the function of designating a successor, and it had its initial opportunity to exercise such powers. But so long as Franco draws breath and retains some degree of lucidity, it will be necessary to look to him for fundamental choices. The current Spanish cabinet, assembled in the closing days of 1973, is a government of veteran regime bureaucrats, with some moderates and reformists, under the new prime minister, Carlos Arias Navarro. It has dropped the Carrero Blanco line of unyielding continuity and initiated the most serious discussion of reformism yet seen during the Franco era. A decision was made in the early winter of 1973-74 to reverse gears, at least partially, and prepare for the post-Franco succession by accommodating and incorporating new sectors of support.

The new policy of *apertura* ("opening," or liberalization) has consisted primarily of two facets, one cultural, the other political. The cultural program has greatly relaxed censorship and has come closer in the past six months to producing an open discussion than Spain has seen since 1936. It is directed by the astute Pio Cabanillas, Minister of Information and Tourism, and by Ricardo de la Cierva, a noted historian and government official, who serves as "Director General of Political Culture." They hold the keys of state censorship and propaganda. Though the Cabanillas-La Cierva policy has by no means fully eliminated censorship or established a completely open marketplace for ideas, there now exists a climate of discussion in Spain that would have been unimaginable a few years earlier.

The proposed political *apertura* is even more important. It has largely centered around the essential problems of political organization and participation. The Franco regime began as a one-party state based on the "National Movement," a hybrid organization formed out of the former fascist party, "Spanish Phalanx." However, the Movement degenerated into a merely bureaucratic organization in the 1940's, and later the Franco system was in danger of changing from a one-party state to a "no-party state." The political philosophy and structure have been founded on the notion of a charismatic national unity that rejects the "poison" and divisiveness of political parties. Its theory is that of the organic, corporate state by which the people are represented through their

status and professions rather than by inorganic direct parliamentary voting. The problem, of course—and this was recognized by reformist elements in the regime in the 1960's—is that direct elections are the only means of direct participation, and the only form truly accepted and recognized by most people in the contemporary Western world, including the people of Spain.

In 1967 about 15 per cent of the seats in the controlled corporate Spanish parliament were opened up for direct election by "heads of families" (not "inorganic" individual voters). Beyond that, much controversy has been generated about recognizing Spanish opinion and its diverse tendencies and interest groups through direct organization, that is, through political parties. Since that would be virtually the same as parliamentary democracy, regime leaders have tried to seek a substitute by proposing to legalize political organizations as individualized sectors of the "Movement," thus coopting and bureaucratizing moderate forms of political opinion by the very structure of their expression.

It is not clear how a state bureaucratic organization can become so liberal as freely to represent discordant tendencies on a democratic basis. For free expression of opinion no substitute has yet been found for open-party democracy representing a multiplicity of free opinions. President Arias and some of the new ministers have evidenced a serious desire for reform, but they do not know how to implement genuine liberalization without undermining the regime's authoritarian bureaucratic structure, and that is a step they dare not take. It is doubtful that any fundamental changes will actually occur before Franco's actual demise, for only Franco has the power and prestige to effect them, or at least to ratify them. But he is no longer in a position to provide real leadership.

At this point, the constitutional laws established by the regime function with outward normality. When the Caudillo passes from the scene his political heir Prince Juan Carlos will undoubtedly become head of state and the new king of Spain. Juan Carlos is frequently called an enigma. Tall, fair, athletic, and rather handsome, he is withal somewhat shy and not an outgoing public figure. His life has not been easy, for his own father was by-passed in the succession process in order that a prince educated under Franco's institutions might become a guarantee for their continuation. His father, Don Juan de Borbón (eldest son of the last Spanish king) is a constitutional liberal and highly critical of the Franquist system, and thus Juan Carlos is himself the conflicted product of a dual legacy, part authoritarian and part liberal. While sensitive to the loyalty due his father, he is well aware that the restoration of the monarchy is due to Franco and not to the inherent sovereignty of the institution

itself. Thus he has been forced to walk a tightrope, maintaining strict formal fidelity to Franco and his institutions while trying to broaden his own contacts and prepare for the day when a more liberal structure of government will be possible in Spain.

It may be inferred that once he is king Juan Carlos will try to promote a careful and discreet liberalization. He has made no clear-cut public statement to this effect; to do so would be to provoke a sort of institutional crisis for the regime. Such expectation is based instead on a variety of hints and on the conclusions drawn by some of those who have talked with him in private.

To judge the degree of respect and support that Juan Carlos can evoke is difficult. He is generally granted little by Madrid political pundits and jokesters. Juan Carlos has himself privately recognized that his education—in large measure military—has been inadequate to his future responsibilities, and he is not a commanding speaker. On the other hand, he is plainly serious, and by any sober analysis rather more intelligent than Spanish café loungers would give him credit for. He does not underestimate the difficulty and complexity of the problems that face him and realizes that one of his overriding tasks must be to reconcile both Franquists and anti-Franquists, the winners and the losers of the great Spanish Civil War of 1936-39.

Moreover, the institutional laws of the Spanish system do not grant him the same latitude long enjoyed by Franco. He is circumscribed in a technical sense by prime minister, cabinet, the Council of the Realm, and the major institutions of government; and, of course, he will not be able to provide the instant arbitration by personal fiat that Franco has imposed whenever he chose.

Any changes that Juan Carlos may wish to promote must be carefully calculated and timed not so much to win the Center and the moderate Left but so as not to alienate the chief forces of the Spanish establishment. The most powerful and critical of these remains the army. Franco did not run a military dictatorship in the ordinary sense of the term, but the army was by far the most important base of his support, and the senior military command has constituted a special élite that always received prime consideration. By and large, the Spanish army remains under the command of hardliners from the Civil War generation, and its officer corps is an inbred group most of whose members come from the families of officers and noncoms. It has a strong sense of caste and of loyalty to the established system. On the other hand, Franco generally kept the army clear of politics, and most officers are primarily professional-minded. They do not want to be involved in governmental affairs. So long as civil leadership is stable and by any standard reasonably



Religious News Service

successful, the great majority of officers would not want to interfere with it.

Thus recent events in Portugal are not necessarily a key to the political future of Spain. Nearly all the chief modern West European dictatorships—the French Second Empire, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and most recently the Portuguese “New State” and the Colonels’ regime in Greece—have been destroyed either by foreign conquest or by defeat and frustration in foreign policy. The continuity of Franco’s regime has been safeguarded by a careful diplomacy that avoided major foreign involvements. Neutrality in World War II saved Franco from the fate of Hitler and Mussolini. Decolonization in Africa has saved his regime from the frustrations of Portugal and Greece. It is unlikely that in the near future the Spanish military will experience the severe frustrations and pressures that radicalized some of their Portuguese counterparts and encouraged the latter to revolt.

The Church is probably less of a political factor at present than it has been for a century. The hierarchy remains to some extent quite conservative, but much of the lower clergy is rather liberal. During recent years a gulf has been growing between the Church and the regime. At the same time, no real bridges have been built to other elements, leaving the Church increasingly neutral.

The regime’s politico-bureaucratic structure, the “Movement,” is currently in a process of confused transition. The Arias Navarro government’s emphasis on *apertura* and representation has created the expectation that the future will require competition and direct voting. Hence the Movement (or “Falangists,” as they are still sometimes called) has been

splitting up into factions trying to define differences and programmatic tendencies. The aim is that these factions somehow take the place of real parties, with left-wing, social reformist Falangists coopting moderate Socialists, and right-wing Falangists holding the support of the most conservative sectors, and so forth. There has been discussion of opening up more seats—perhaps all the seats—in the parliament to direct election, but only for the election of diverse competing sectors of the Movement posing as different parties. This is an attempt to have one's cake and eat it too; its success is very doubtful.

The real political attitudes and preferences of the Spanish public are hard to judge. During the past few years there have been several serious efforts at opinion polls, censorship notwithstanding, and the results indicate very moderate attitudes on the part of most Spanish people, though it is hard to say to what extent this may be conditioned by lingering fear of reprisal for being too outspoken.

Though the most violent sector of the opposition can assassinate the prime minister—not too difficult a task, in view of the relaxed conditions that prevailed in 1973—the opposition in general is still not a powerful force to be reckoned with, nor will it be for the very near future. In a depoliticized authoritarian society opposition parties have little substance. Only the Communists have a real organization, but they will also have the hardest time establishing their legitimacy.

The new center force of Spanish affairs ought to be the Christian Democrats, but serious doubt now exists that the Christian Democrats will be able to play the role in a liberalized Spain that their counterparts played in Italy, France, and Germany after 1945. The increasing liberalization and apoliticization of the Roman Catholic Church makes it difficult to use Catholicism as a civic rallying point in the way it was used during the post-1945 generation. Political neutralization of the Church may mean neutralization of Christian Democracy as a force in Spanish affairs. Second, the would-be Christian Democrat factions are hopelessly divided and lack even the ghost of common leadership. At this point there seems little hope that they can coalesce into an effective political force in the near future.

The institutional structure of the regime will continue, then, after Franco, but the new leaders have made it clear that they realize it must be liberalized and made more representative. None of the suggestions made so far have bridged the gulf between authoritarian rule and representative democracy, so that they face the proverbial problem of dismounting from the tiger. Few accomplish the feat safely.

In the short run, Spanish society, while now really

hopeful of change for the first time, will be content with palliatives and modest reforms. After Franco dies, however, Juan Carlos and the new government will soon have to fish or cut bait. If the system is opened to direct elections, a rapid process of politicization would ensue that might quickly get out of hand. Spanish communism might for the first time grow into a regular mass party in peacetime and outdo the more moderate Socialists. By all indications, the Christian Democrats ought to have a large base among Spain's broad Catholic lower middle class, but their deficiencies in leadership, cohesion, and political sense might prevent them from serving as an effective counterweight to the Left. Just how far the newly competitive tendencies of the Movement could get as a functioning political party or parties is open to doubt, and for this reason the institutionally entrenched elements will strongly resist a genuine liberalization.

If a return to representative politics should quickly begin to get out of hand, the extreme Right would be a more immediate danger than the Left, for in those circumstances the military would almost undoubtedly step in to reimpose a hard authoritarian line. Moreover, Spain has been accustomed to order and tranquillity for thirty-five years, and moderates have already expressed fear of an "Italianization" of Spanish life, which could bring political instability and polarization, widespread strikes, and general confusion. The Spanish middle classes are not at this point sufficiently eager for change to have much interest in such risks.

Reform thus depends on timing, modulation, and success. It must not proceed so rapidly as to alienate the entrenched Right, and it must not get out of hand. Equally important, it must provide some real payoff in stability and legitimization. That is, it must achieve a functional form of democracy fairly directly. That is a tall order; current events in neighboring Italy and Portugal are not encouraging.

Spanish society has become strongly "consumerized," and the continuing stability of the regime has been in large part predicated on the boom economy of the past fifteen years. The GNP rose 7.5 per cent in 1973, but has dropped off somewhat this year due to inflation and disturbed international economic conditions. Much of Spain's recent growth is the result of foreign stimuli in the form of direct investments and tourism. All signs point to a decline in both factors, and the country is already facing difficult adjustments that may well grow more severe.

The handicaps besetting a successful liberalization of Spain after Franco would seem to be severe. The more likely prognosis for the immediate post-Franco period is basic continuity modified by only partial and limited liberalization.