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**THE SPANISH SOCIALIST  
WORKERS PARTY (PSOE)  
1879-1988  
FROM REPUBLICAN  
TO LIBERAL SOCIALISM**

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***The Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), 1879-1988:  
from Republican to Liberal Socialism***

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**Abstract:** The debate on the Marxist nature of the PSOE has resulted in less attention being paid to the influence of Republican doctrine on the party. The leftist Spanish Republicans were not only the Socialist's "travelling companions", but provided much of the PSOE's ideology. Federalism and the problem of nationalism, agrarian reform, the importance of education and the need to embrace the middle class and intellectuals, made the PSOE just another Republican party. Once Spanish Socialism abandoned the German orthodoxy of the theory of two worlds, and given their lack of true understanding regarding Marxist thought, Spanish Republicanism became the genuine reference point for the PSOE until Francisco Franco's death.

**Key Word:** socialism, republicanism, Spain.

***1. Introduction: Spanish Socialism returns from exile***

On 20 November 1975 Francisco Franco died at the age of eighty-three. His death marked the end of one of the longest-lived dictatorships in western Europe, a product of the world prior to World War II which was sustained by post-war bloc politics. One year earlier, in October 1974, Felipe González began to take the reins of the historical Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) – the Spanish Socialist Workers Party. During the XXVI Congress of the Party, held in the French city of Suresnes, González and the *renovadores* proposed bringing the PSOE out of the obscure exile that had reduced the party to little more than a symbolic organization with some 7000 members. In that same year, the Socialist Party had defined itself as a working-class party whose most immediate objective was to wrest power from the Communist Party (PCE), which held control over the leftist opposition to Francoism within the country.

The death of the dictator precipitated the events. No longer was it a question of opposing the dictatorship, but its legacy, making it essential that the party exert a decisive

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influence on the transition to democracy. This was the task undertaken in December 1976 during the XXVII Congress of the PSOE, held in Spain for the first time in forty-four years. The party needed to establish its political presence in society, occupy the political arena that it had been denied during the Franco regime and be visible in the media if the organization were to consolidate itself and make its place in a society that was experiencing a political revival following four decades of dictatorship. The task of reconstructing the party and making it visible to society was not yet considered incompatible with the PSOE's Marxist political line, which had been endorsed in the previous congress. Indeed, amidst the battle being waged with the PCE, the party's recognition of its Marxist nature was considered an essential step for it to become the predominant leftist party. As González declared in 1976, "When we say that our party is Marxist, we have serious reasons for doing so".<sup>1</sup> The Spanish transition, however, would lead the PSOE (and the PCE) down a very different road than the one envisaged by its leaders following Franco's death.

When the PSOE held its first congress in Spain after returning from exile, party membership numbered a scant ten thousand. Yet just a few months later, with a still weak organization, it became the principal opposition party. On 15 June 1977, in the first post-Franco democratic elections, the PSOE won 29.3 per cent of the vote and 118 parliamentary seats, while the PCE, the genuine opposition force to the dictatorship, would have to settle for 9.4 per cent of the vote and 20 parliamentary seats. The Francoist right – drawn together around the figure of Manuel Fraga Iribarne, former Franco minister who created the Alianza Popular (AP) to run in the elections - fell in behind the PCE, attaining a mere 8.3 per cent of the vote and 16 seats. The Unión del Centro Democrático (UCD), the party headed by Adolfo Suárez made up of former moderate Francoists including Suárez himself and liberal reformers, won the elections with 34.6 per cent of the vote and 166 seats. As said at the time, Spanish society overwhelmingly chose to be represented by two centre parties that would be capable of steering the country towards the Spanish Constitution of 1978.<sup>2</sup>

In 1977, Spanish society saw in the PSOE what the party leaders still chose to ignore: a centre-left party that was more liberal-socialist than Marxist, willing to accept the Monarchy and modernize society without radically reformist tactics. It was a party, which in an express tribute to the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, and not to Marx, wanted to convert Spain into an advanced capitalist country. Indeed, it was a party that would ultimately accept neo-liberal principles in its economic programme (as occurred several years later when the PSOE came into power). This contradiction between the party's radical ideological base and its practical

policy of moderate reform, would not take long to manifest itself. When the PSOE gained only two more seats than it had in 1977 in the elections of March 1979 - after the new democratic Constitution had been passed - voices led by Felipe González began to speak out for the need to redefine the party's lines with a view to the XXVIII Congress. As one prominent Socialist leader pointed out, "González went to the meeting with the idea of making the party a government alternative". Felipe González's team wanted to "adapt the party to the social reality", meaning that first it had to renounce Marxism - it was a question of being "Socialists before Marxists".<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, the proposal to convert the PSOE into a Social-Democratic party akin to other European parties that would be capable of shedding its old Marxist trappings and governing without radical reform, was defeated by ample majority in the XXVIII Congress. Although 68 per cent of those attending the congress supported the party platform, 61 per cent rejected the proposal to drop Marxism. What the party members wanted was a Marxist party led by Felipe González, who, to everyone's surprise, resigned as General Secretary. A committee was then set up with a view to the forthcoming Extraordinary Congress that was to be held in September 1979. At that congress González was re-elected General Secretary with 86 per cent of the vote and the party finally agreed to renounce its Marxist dogma and former radical rhetoric. The triumphant reformist sector of the PSOE saw in the Extraordinary Congress its own Bad Godesberg – the Congress of '59 in which the German Social Democrats decided to abandon Marxism – while the radical wing felt that the change in the party line was a betrayal of "the revolutionary spirit of Pablo Iglesias's party".<sup>4</sup>

It is not true, however, that the revolutionary spirit of the PSOE was betrayed in the Extraordinary Congress. Not even in the most dramatic moments of the Spanish Civil War had the PSOE been a revolutionary party. The radical wing seemed to have forgotten the pragmatic and reformist temperament of the party's founder Pablo Iglesias, clinging instead to a very superficial concept of Marxism – a "decaffeinated" Marxism<sup>5</sup> - that kept them from seeing exactly what the PSOE was renouncing. What came to light in the Extraordinary Congress was not so much the skin-deep Marxism of the PSOE as the Republican-Democratic influence that the party had assumed with quite some effort since the late nineteenth century until the Second Spanish Republic in 1931. In order for the party to be a government option, the PSOE did not have to choose, as has often been said, between Felipe González and Marx, but between Republicanism and Liberalism. In the pages that follow we shall see how the process of "republicanization" experienced by the PSOE began with its creation in 1879 and how the party rid itself of its Republican vestiges following Franco's death. The Liberalism of

the PSOE during the transition from dictatorship to democracy would ultimately bring the party to power in 1982, leading to the split in 1988 with the Socialist trade union, Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT); a rupture that marked the definitive end of the Republican influence in the PSOE.

## ***2. The origins of Spanish Socialism: from the theory of the two worlds to the Republican-Socialist Conjunction***

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, European Socialists attempted to follow to the letter, albeit with greater or lesser success, the doctrine of the “two worlds” or of the two shores, developed by the German Socialist Party (SPD). According to this doctrine, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat belonged to two radically different and opposing worlds in which the disappearance of the former was a necessary prerequisite for the existence of the latter:

“the world of possessors and the world of the dispossessed, the world of capital and the world of work, the world of the oppressors and the world of the oppressed, the world of the bourgeoisie and the world of socialism: two worlds with opposing purposes, aspirations and visions, with different languages, two worlds that cannot coexist, where one must displace the other”<sup>6</sup>

This was how Wilhelm Liebknecht, one of the most prominent leaders of the SPD, expressed himself in 1871. In this clear manner, he set down one of the principles that would be firmly established in 1875 in the Gotha Programme of German Social Democracy: the working class is self-reliant and compared to it all other social classes are a “reactionary mass”.<sup>7</sup> The mission of the Socialist Party was, therefore, to create its own world in the heart of the bourgeois world. The working class had to read its own newspapers, attend its own schools and establish technical universities. It was necessary to lay the foundations for a proletarian culture that would displace the capitalist world. Although Marx bitterly rejected the idea of two worlds in their *Critique of the Gotha Programme* in a defence of the old Republican-Democratic ideal that the working class could unite with more progressive members of the middle class and peasants, the official stance of the SPD would come to be considered the quintessence of orthodox Marxism by the end of the nineteenth century.

Imbued with the “orthodox” spirit of the time, a handful of workers from Madrid led by Pablo Iglesias founded the Partido Socialista Obrero Español in 1879 and the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT) nine years later in 1888 to “live completely removed from all bourgeois parties and take political action as a workers’ party”.<sup>8</sup> Like the SPD, the Spanish Socialist workers wanted to create their own world and displace the bourgeoisie. But unlike the SPD, the Spanish Socialists did not have a sufficiently strong industrial working class to support the project. In an agrarian country like Spain, the orthodox posture of the Socialists prevented them from consolidating their forces since by considering peasants and the petit bourgeoisie a reactionary mass they were essentially turning their backs on the social reality of the country. In 1903, fifteen years after the PSOE was founded, Antonio García Quejido, one of the party’s most notable leaders, called for a pact with the progressive Republicans owing to the poor success of the party’s working-class strategy. Although the pact was rejected, the main leaders of the PSOE, Pablo Iglesias among them, adopted a less optimistic rhetoric on the revolutionary possibilities of the proletariat, what he called “a clear ideological evolution towards reformism that follows the lines set down by European Social Democracy”.<sup>9</sup> The constant fall in party membership, the Socialist disaster in the elections of 1907 and the events of the Tragic Week<sup>10</sup> finally convinced Pablo Iglesias of the need to come out of isolation and reach a pact with the Republicans in 1909. That pact – or the Republican-Socialist Conjunction as it was called then – would win Pablo Iglesias a seat in the Chamber of Deputies in 1910.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, little more than twenty years after it was founded, the PSOE, like a great many Socialist parties in Europe, abandoned the theory of two worlds to sit in a bourgeois parliament alongside a progressive bourgeois party: the Unión Republicana of Nicolás Salmerón. The pact with the Republicans was not just a means to an end, nor was it simply an electoral tactic employed by Spanish Socialists and Republicans, but ushered in a series of important changes in Spanish Socialism, converting the PSOE “into one more Republican party”.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the PSOE’s programme acquired an increasingly solid theoretical base. Firstly, the PSOE took the “agrarian problem” seriously for the first time, commissioning a detailed plan for reforming rural Spain. Peasants were no longer deemed to be a reactionary mass, but a crucial element in the party’s development. Accordingly, the UGT proposed penetrating the peasant world, which had hitherto been dominated by Republicans and Anarchists.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, influenced by Republican Federalism, the Socialists began to show

interest in the “regional problem”, a matter which had been overshadowed by Socialist internationalism. The party’s neglect of the regional problem, like that of agrarian reform, meant that Spanish Socialism would not take as strong a hold as hoped for in Catalonia or the Basque Country, in spite of the fact that these were the two most industrially developed regions of Spain. With the notion of the two worlds at its height, the PSOE viewed the Catalan and Basque demands as a bourgeois political problem: the proletariat lacked a homeland and would not find it in Catalonia or the Basque Country. The Catalan working class, influenced by the popular Federalist Republicanism of Catalonia, joined the ranks of Federalist Anarchism, of the reformist Socialism of Solidaridad Catalana or even the conservative Republicanism of the Lliga Regionalista. Coinciding with the Conjunction, a debate got underway in the PSOE on the importance of wooing the most advanced members of Catalanism over to the Socialist terrain. Although this strategy initially failed, the debate on the much-needed alliance between Catalanism and Socialism would prompt the Socialists to refer to Catalonia as an “oppressed nation” and to propose a “Republican Confederation of Iberian Nationalities” in its political programme.<sup>14</sup>

Thirdly, in practice, the Conjunction involved renouncing the idea of two worlds. Class interests were gradually transformed into national interests, while the enemies of the working class were no longer the bourgeoisie *en bloc*, but the plutocracy and their bulwark in Spain: the Bourbon Monarchy of Alfonso XIII. The most radical antagonism was not felt between the bourgeoisie and the proletariats, but between Republicans of all makes, be they Socialists or not, and supporters of the Monarchy:

“Down with the Monarchy! –demanded Pablo Iglesias in 1917- Onward with the Republican regime, which will in turn permit the bourgeoisie to reach full development and aid the proletariat in becoming a strong force, notably influence national issues and accelerate the happy moment of putting an end to social antagonism!”<sup>15</sup>

The coalition with the Republicans led Pablo Iglesias to propose a gradual, reformist defence of the struggle for Socialism. The most urgent task was not to take power by means of a revolution, but to bring about a change in the regime and transform Spain into a democratic state:

“The task of renewal, the task of making Spain capable of embarking upon a new life and marching to the drumbeat of other nations is the work of another regime and other politicians. The regime must be democratic and the men whom it serves must be inspired by the desires of the nation and possess a will capable of overcoming any obstacle. This is how we can escape from the prostration in which we live, move quickly ahead in the political, economic, civil and religious order and prepare the ground so that socialism, which is conquering the Power in other nations, will take control of it in Spain, and lay down the foundations for the new social order that must benefit all.”<sup>16</sup>

The pact with the Republicans not only permitted a Socialist deputy to occupy a seat in the Spanish Parliament for the first time ever, but also provided other countless benefits to the PSOE and the UGT. In 1909 the Socialist Party attained 53 councillors - 30 more than they previously had – for a total of 135 in 1913. Furthermore, from 1907 to 1917 membership in the PSOE rose from 6000 to 13,600, while the UGT, with scarcely 57,000 activists in 1905, increased its membership to over 140,000. In a country lacking a developed working class, Republicanism, rather than Marxism, was the only means for the Socialists to gain ground.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Spanish Republicans were going full force in an attempt to offer society a unitary party that could draw together the diverse factions dividing them since the Revolution of 1868; a revolution that had resulted in the short-lived First Spanish Republic.<sup>17</sup> Since that time, Spanish Republicanism had been split into three factions: a leftist faction which was radical, democratic, federalist and insurgent, and whose ideals were founded on the French Revolution of 1848 and in the fraternal Republicanism of Louis Blanc and Auguste Blanqui. No doubt this was the most influential tendency of Republicanism and the one that found greatest support among the working classes of Spain. In the centre, with Nicolás Salmerón at the head, were the Republicans who rejected insurgency and promoted the institutional route in the struggle for a parliamentary majority that would favour the transition from the Monarchy to the Republic. The Republican right, which was in favour of participating alongside the Liberals in the governments of the Alfonso XIII Monarchy, played an insignificant role in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The Republican left and centre - the factions that exerted the greatest influence on the PSOE – were distinguishable by their greater or lesser passion for insurgency, albeit they defended a series of common doctrines:



- a) Freedom was defined in classical terms as being in opposition to slavery.
- b) The state was viewed from a federalist standpoint.
- c) Not only did the Republicans promote the absolute separation between Church and State, but prided themselves on their anti-clerical stance.
- d) Lacking in a developed economic theory, oppression was condemned on moral grounds in consonance with the Republican ideal of freedom.
- e) Finally, the concept of “illustrated rationalism” was defended above all.<sup>18</sup>

For the Republican left, the revolution had to reject all authority, be atheist, popular, fraternal and radically democratic as the Republic must be governed by “the people, the productive classes of society, artists, artisans, workers”.<sup>19</sup> It should come as no surprise, then, that in Spain - a country on the periphery of capitalism fed up with the abuse of power by the Monarchy - Anarchism took a stronger hold than Socialism, since the Spanish Anarchists were “former Republicans turned Libertarian”.<sup>20</sup> When the Socialists eschewed the concept of two worlds, it was natural for them to turn to democratic Republicanism in order to gain ground in the cities and countryside alike. Spanish Socialism turned to Republicanism not only in a pragmatic gesture to accept the Conjunction, but because it had, in effect, adopted much of the rhetoric, principles and objectives of the Republican left in the early twentieth century. Thus, for the first time, Socialism truly began to take root among the country’s working class. The agrarian problem, a central topic of reflection by the Republican Joaquín Costa, brought the Socialists even closer to the agrarian world.<sup>21</sup> The national question - which Republicanism had never ignored given its federalist tradition and was of utmost importance to the Catalan Republicans - became the subject of increasing debate among the Socialists, who had previously held no position whatsoever on the topic. The need for a universal system of basic education in an overwhelmingly illiterate country such as Spain was a matter of great concern to the Republicans of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* and yet another of the Socialists’ demands. And finally, the struggle for a Social Republic as a previous step towards Socialism became the principal theme of Pablo Iglesias’s writings from the beginning of the century until his death in 1925.

### ***3. The influence of the Russian Revolution and collaboration with Primo de Rivera***

The most original Spanish political thought and the influence on the working classes thus fell within the Republican realm. Socialism, which in Spain had no notable theoreticians, gained political weight and theoretical clarity with the Conjunction. But unlike the Socialists - who had rallied around the PSOE and the UGT until the emergence of the Third International largely owing to Iglesias's pragmatism - the Republicans had a long tradition of splitting into factions and families to which they remained loyal. The efforts made by Nicolás Salmerón to reunite all these families bore their fruit in 1903, as we have said, with the creation of the Unión Republicana. Yet in 1908 Republicanism became divided yet once again. From its core emerged two new parties: the Reformist Party, led by Melquíades Álvarez and Gumersindo de Azcárate, who supported collaboration with the Liberals in the government; and the Radical Party of Alejandro Lerroux with a marked populist line.<sup>22</sup> However, it was not the Republican division that most affected Spanish Socialism (which in fact maintained the Conjunction until 1920), but the split in the heart of the organization – as occurred in the rest of Europe – following the Russian Revolution and the creation of the Third International.

The failure of the general revolutionary strike called by Socialists, Republicans and Anarchists for March 1917 with the aim of ousting Alfonso XIII and forming a Constituent Assembly, convinced Pablo Iglesias that Spain was not prepared for an undertaking of this kind. Following the triumph of the Russian Revolution, the Socialist leader wrote an article in which he rejected the usefulness of the Russian case for Spanish Socialism:

“To us they seem to be short-sighted, poor observers, if not verging on the reactionary, those who express the belief that a revolutionary movement in Spain would be the inevitable consequence of a state or situation equal to that which exists in Russia today. Are the conditions in Spain the same as those in that country when czarism fell? Are the characters of the two peoples the same? Are the circumstances here the same as there? We do not believe so. And if this is the case, we judge it dangerous to speculate what would happen in Spain if there were a strong political upheaval, the same as in Russia”<sup>23</sup>

This was the official stance taken by a Socialist Party which, like other European Socialist parties, finally broke up after refusing to form part of the Third International. The

birth of the Communist Party was viewed by the PSOE as a drama with two far-reaching consequences. On the one hand, Pablo Iglesias opted for a “Liberal Socialism”; for the reformist and parliamentary route to improve the country’s situation in general and that of the working class in particular, choosing to promote a diffuse Socialism that “all would praise and bless” in the future.<sup>24</sup> For Iglesias, “the Liberals who the Socialists defeat are Liberals in name only, while the Socialists are Socialists for real”.<sup>25</sup> The triumph of the English Labourist MacDonald in 1924 proved Iglesias right regarding the “road of dementia” taken by the Communists. Iglesias’s condemnation of capitalism took on a more moral than political tone, and “in no moment was there concern for elaborating a strategy which, from the Socialist movement, would permit raising the question of political change”.<sup>26</sup> Spanish Socialism was thus depoliticized and the founder of the PSOE eschewed all reflections of a Marxist nature just as he had been doing for several years.

On the other hand, however, the pressure exerted by the Communists led some Socialists to return to the party’s late nineteenth-century working class dogma, to recover the former notion of two worlds. Given the lack of a clear Socialist strategy by Iglesias to curb Communism and Fascism, the theory of two worlds prevailed once again in the heart of a PSOE now led by Francisco Largo Caballero and Julián Besteiro. This marked the end of the Conjunction in 1921 and the beginning of collaboration with the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. World events did not pass inadverted in Spain, in spite of the fact that the country had not taken part in World War I. In fact, Spain’s neutrality during the war served to enrich the haute bourgeoisie which, with the aid of liberal governments, conservative governments and the Monarchy, did a booming business with wartime Europe. Meanwhile, the working class suffered great hardship and the peasants went hungry, that is, when they were not sent to die in Morocco in a pointless colonial war in which Spain chalked up one defeat after another. The continual strikes and demonstrations fomented by Socialists and Anarchists from 1918 to 1923, as well as the military disaster of Annual (Morocco) for which no one wanted to take responsibility, led to a political crisis in ’23 that ultimately ended in a *coup d’etat* carried out by General Miguel Primo de Rivera and endorsed by King Alfonso XIII.

Unlike the Communists and Anarchists, the Socialists condemned the coup, but persuaded their rank-and-file not to mobilize against the dictatorship until they were able to ascertain the course adopted by the military government. The justification for the position

taken by the most prominent leaders of the PSOE, Francisco Largo Caballero and Julián Besteiro, was the following: neither the Constitutional Monarchy nor the dictatorship were democratic regimes and therefore akin to one another. Now, if the dictatorship respected worker's rights, the Socialists would cause no problems. Consequently, after several meetings between leaders of the PSOE and General Primo de Rivera, the Socialist Party decided to collaborate with the military government.<sup>27</sup> In 1924 the Ministry of Labour was set up with Largo Caballero as State Adviser to represent the UGT. The military regime, with its sound logic, directed its repression at the Communists and the Anarchists, while respecting Socialist headquarters, locales and activists. The PSOE refused to see what the entire left – including Communists, Anarchists and Republicans- clearly saw, that is, that the dictatorship was a regime established to defend a protectionist bourgeoisie in economic terms and a proto-fascist bourgeoisie in political terms.<sup>28</sup> This political short-sightedness would cost the party dearly since the PSOE's participation in the Ministry of Labour did not, contrary to what they believed, serve to promote labour laws in benefit of the workers. The rupture of the Conjunction divided the PSOE and the middle class, while the party's collaboration with the regime distanced it from the workers in the party. Indeed, by 1928 the PSOE had 8000 members, as many – or as few – as at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> Given this situation, the Socialists toyed with the idea of turning the Socialist Party into a sort of labour party akin to the British experience. Yet if the country was not ripe enough for a proletariat revolution, it was certainly less prepared to have a labour party similar to the one in Great Britain rise to office.

The Primo de Rivera regime continued on its course, taking on the task of drawing the Spanish right together into one large party in 1925 - la Unión Patriótica- which would oversee the transition to a parliamentary monarchy. With this aim, a National Assembly was announced that would eventually take place in September 1927. Once again the PSOE debated the question of whether or not to participate in the Assembly, a proposal that was finally rejected due to the corporatist nature of the meeting. It should be pointed out that this decision likely saved Spanish Socialism from its complete demise given that the PSOE's relationship with the dictatorship had begun to wane and its participation in the Assembly would have been poorly looked upon by the working class. Furthermore, following the death of Pablo Iglesias, the new leaders of the PSOE, namely Fernando de los Ríos and Largo Caballero, proposed that the party once again side with the Republican movement. The PSOE

thus joined in forging the Pact of San Sebastian for the Republic, coming to form part of the Republican Revolutionary Committee in 1930, which had planned an uprising for October 28 of that same year. Ultimately, the uprising did not go ahead, but the Republican movement was so strong by that time and the Monarchy and dictatorship so weak that on 14 April 1931, King Alfonso XIII fled the country and the Second Spanish Republic was proclaimed without a single drop of blood being shed.<sup>30</sup>

#### ***4. The Second Republic: the renovation of the Republican-Socialist alliance***

Once again Spanish Socialism was kept afloat by becoming Republican. This is what Julián Besteiro was referring to in 1931 when he said: “Spanish Socialism should not only be an organization that defends the Republic, but the main political instrument of its perfection and progress”.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, in both the Republican and the Socialist movements, certain changes had come about that merit examination in order to better understand the Republican-Socialist alliance. Spanish Republicanism had experienced some bad moments during the twenties. While republics were being established throughout the majority of European countries in the aftermath of World War I, the Spanish Monarchy continued to enjoy relative stability. When this was no longer the case, the Monarchy adhered to the Primo de Rivera dictatorship with great success, at least in the beginning. Yet it was precisely this dictatorship that would lead to the resurgence of the Republican movement; a movement which took firm root among the working class. Because the dictatorship effectively dismantled the former political regime that had legitimized and maintained the king on the throne - a Constitutional Monarchy that allowed Conservatives and Liberals to govern in turn through fixed elections – the very Monarchy was discredited. Republican sentiment spread like wildfire throughout the country. Both old and new Republicans – Lerroux’s Radicals, the Radical-Socialists, Manuel Azaña’s Acción Republicana and the Catalan Republicans – signed the Pact of San Sebastian in 1930 in favour of the Republic, an event which the Socialists were invited to attend.<sup>32</sup> Some months after the failed insurgency movement of December 1930, a new Republican-Socialist coalition swept the board in local elections, thus confirming the King’s popular discredit.

Following Pablo Iglesias’s death in 1925, the Socialists were lacking a figurehead that could draw together the different tendencies in the party. Although it was not a wholly

categorical division, it can be said that three families coexisted within the PSOE. The first of these was the working-class right represented by Julián Besteiro, who yearned for the old Social-Democratic orthodoxy of the two worlds. His continual refusal to mix with bourgeois parties and the error of supporting collaboration with the dictatorship had much to do with the disastrous situation experienced by the PSOE in the twenties. On the left was Largo Caballero, who committed much the same error. The left-wing sectors led by Caballero swung from revolutionary maximalism to the working-class dogma of Besteiro without any clear criteria. In the centre, Indalecio Prieto represented positions that were closer to the late reformism of Pablo Iglesias.<sup>33</sup> Once again, after drawn-out debates on the convenience of participating or not with the Republicans in the Revolutionary Committee and in the municipal coalition, the Socialists – with Caballero and Prieto at the head – decided to regain lost ground by forming a new Republican-Socialist alliance. After some months of a provisional government in which the PSOE participated, the Republicans maintained the coalition with the Socialists in order to run in the elections of June 1931 whose aim was to open the constituency process. In the opinion of the Republicans, this was the best way for the working class to feel that they formed part of the new political regime. The Republican-Socialist bloc gained the majority in Congress and the Socialists strengthened their presence in the government. The PSOE, with 114 seats, thus became the most important party in the Republican Chamber. Prieto was appointed Minister of Finance, Fernando de los Ríos, Minister of Justice and Largo Caballero, Minister of Labour.<sup>34</sup>

What role did the Socialists play in the first government of the Second Republic? Their main task consisted of consolidating the Republic before embarking upon Socialist policies that would radically transform society. Prieto, the Minister of Public Works since 31 December, undertook the ambitious General Plan for Hydraulic Works to carry out irrigation projects in the Extremadura region. Largo Caballero passed a series of measures to protect workers' rights that did not, in any way, threaten the *latifundista* (large landholding) structure. Nevertheless, businessmen and landholders became concerned about trade union interventionism, a fact that led them to unite against Republican social reformism and demand that the Socialists abandon government. On the other hand, Fernando de los Ríos promoted a Republican constitution that was openly inspired in the Constitution of the Weimar Republic. The Socialist Luis Jiménez de Asúa, one of the most important members of the committee in

charge of drafting the Constitution, vehemently stressed the Republican-Democratic nature of the Spanish Constitution:

“The two-chamber system is clearly in decadence and we have observed that when the people have made widespread demands, a single chamber was established. This occurred, for example, in France in 1791 and in 1848; the same thing occurred in Spain in the Cortes of Cadiz...Therefore, given that our Constitution is highly democratic, we will establish a single Chamber. The two-chamber system is exceedingly harmful.”<sup>35</sup>

Nonetheless, the Republican-Socialist alliance, incapable of quelling landowner resistance, failed in its pursuit to develop rural Spain through agrarian reform. This was further exacerbated by the crisis that occurred in the heart of the Republican coalition. Pressured by the bourgeoisie and landholders, Lerroux’s Radical Party demanded that the Socialists be expelled from government. Socialists and the Republican left – particularly the Prime Minister Manuel Azaña – considered the Republican foundational pact to be inviolable and viewed the presence of the Socialists in the government as the only means to integrate the working class. Finding his request rejected, Lerroux’s Radical Party abandoned the government, leaving Manuel Azaña’s small party, the Acción Republicana, in the minority.<sup>36</sup>

The role played by the Socialists was, then, a clearly modernizing one. Their short-term objective was not so much to carry out a Socialist revolution, but instead to put Spain on a par with more developed neighbouring countries. But the country was not even prepared for this, particularly the bourgeoisie, who founded a party with the explicit aim of defending their interests. The Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA) won the elections in 1933, the same year the party was created, and the left, including the PSOE, took an even more radical position. Events were occurring at a very fast pace and everything seemed to be leading to the disaster of 1936. In October 1934, a poorly organised working-class rising in Asturias was easily and brutally quashed by the army. Once again, the internal divisions of the PSOE came to light: Largo Caballero was convinced that the failure of the Revolution in Asturias signified nothing less than the beginning of a revolutionary period that would end in victory for the Socialist revolution. Prieto, on the other hand, believed that the events in Asturias should put an end to the policy of a working class front united against the right in order to strengthen the alliance with the Republican left.<sup>37</sup> The split in the PSOE between the Prieto “left” and the Caballero “right” was definitive. Prieto’s posture would eventually win out when the Communist International encouraged a policy of popular front alliances. Thus,

the creation in 1936 of the Popular Front – in which Republicans and Socialists once again joined forces accompanied now by Communists – did not have as its objective the struggle for Socialism, but the consolidation of a Republic and a democracy opposed to the belligerent, fascist-minded Spanish right. The Civil War soon dashed this hope and Spain, which the European democracies turned their backs on, fell into the hands of a fascist dictatorship that would survive – albeit under various guises at different times – until the death of Francisco Franco in 1975. After the war “the PSOE was detained in time, practically reduced to a party in exile”.<sup>38</sup>

### ***5. The Liberal Socialism of Felipe González***

When Felipe González occupied the post of General Secretary of the PSOE in 1974, he encountered a party with more or less the same number of members as it had had at the end of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, given that it had been in exile, the party lacked influence within the country and was alien to the vicissitudes of Spanish politics. The PCE had become the genuine leftist opposition force against Francoism and created a trade union, Comisiones Obreras, which unlike the UGT, was working to improve working conditions directly in the factories. González found a Marxist party – as he himself defined it - that had no desire whatsoever to follow in the footsteps of the Social-Democratic parties of Europe. In short, he encountered a party radicalized by exile and which envisaged in the recent Revolution of the Carnations in Portugal or the expulsion of the monarchy and the fall of the Dictatorship of the Colonels in Greece, a model to bring back the Republic and democracy to southern Europe. Given this context, it is likely that González found it easy to insist that the PSOE was a Marxist party. However, five years later, in 1979, with 120 deputies, hundreds of mayors, councillors and party representatives, he no longer believed this position advisable.<sup>39</sup> According to Felipe González, the time had come for the PSOE to follow the road taken by the most important Social-Democratic parties of the Socialist International; the same ones that had lent him so much support (particularly the German party of Willy Brandt and the French party of François Mitterrand). This was the moment, as we all know, when González raised the question of foregoing Marxism to become Socialist. But did Spanish Socialism truly renounce Marxism? The doctrines renounced by the PSOE were more closely linked to the party’s Republican tradition than its weak Marxist tradition. Spanish Socialism accepted the return of the Bourbon Monarchy and a less progressive Constitution in social and



political terms than that of the Republic with a Senate expressly designed to put a brake on proposals by a possible left-wing chamber.<sup>40</sup> They accepted improvements in rural Spain that did not involve agrarian reform and contributed to designing a State of the Autonomies that was far removed from the Republican ideal of a federal Spain. The Socialists did all of this with the aim of rising to power; an objective that was achieved in October 1982 by overwhelming majority, just one year after the coup attempt that had the country on tenterhooks.<sup>41</sup> From this viewpoint, then, the pragmatism of González not only reaped its rewards, but put the party on the path of reformism initiated by Pablo Iglesias. Republican Socialism was thus converted into a theoretically weak Liberal Socialism.<sup>42</sup> With a light Social-Democratic patina in education, social services and health, Felipe González favoured the neo-liberal policies of Miguel Boyer, first Minister of the Economy under the PSOE. As Carlos Solchaga, Minister of Industry in the Socialist government, who succeeded Miguel Boyer in the Ministry of the Economy in 1985 explains:

“There were two trends in the Government. One, represented by Boyer, followed the macroeconomic guidelines of the OECD and the Bank of Spain, which defended reducing the deficit and controlling public spending; the other trend, a majority in any Social-Democratic party, was in favour of spending more on everything. I took the middle position, although I increasingly leaned towards Miguel Boyer’s position. There was an atmosphere of tension, but it was settled by Felipe González in favour of Miguel Boyer.”<sup>43</sup>

Naturally, a high price had to be paid for González’s new Liberal Socialism. From 1982 to 1988 the UGT had accepted a tough-minded policy of wage restraint and industrial ‘reconversion’ to permit the country to continue to grow. However, in ’88 the PSOE and the UGT broke off their relations and the trade union – together with Comisiones Obreras – called for a general strike that was an enormous success. The trade unions believed that the transition to democracy had been pursued at the expense of the working class, which had lost its social and economic power.<sup>44</sup> The strike, which forced the PSOE to take a more socially-oriented political line that was more favourable to the economic interests of the working class, did not weaken González’s electoral appeal. Indeed, for the third time running, González once again won the elections by absolute majority, and in 1993 he won for the last time with a relative majority. Although Felipe Gonzalez’s liberal political programme led to the rupture with the UGT, voters confided in him until 1996, the year in which he lost the elections in the aftermath of a series of scandals for corruption.

## 6. Conclusion

The debate on the Marxist nature of the PSOE has resulted in less attention being paid to the influence of Republican doctrine on the party. The leftist Spanish Republicans were not only the Socialist's "travelling companions", but provided much of the PSOE's ideology. Federalism and the problem of nationalism, agrarian reform, the importance of education and the need to embrace the middle class and intellectuals, made the PSOE just another Republican party. Once Spanish Socialism abandoned the German orthodoxy of the theory of two worlds, and given their lack of true understanding regarding Marxist thought, Spanish Republicanism became the genuine reference point for the PSOE until Francisco Franco's death. When Felipe González took hold of the party reins, he was no longer confronted with the dilemma of choosing between Socialism and Marxism, but between Republicanism and Liberalism. The situation of the PSOE at the end of the seventies had nothing to do with that of the SPD at the end of the fifties. The PSOE faced a transition from dictatorship to democracy in which the politicians of the Franco regime, together with the King, actively took part in designing the future Spanish democracy. In this context, the PSOE adopted a liberal concept of politics, not a Republican one (and much less so a Marxist one), as a means of survival. The long drawn-out evolution of Republicanism to Liberalism is a better reflection of Spanish Socialism than the rejection of a supposed Marxist dogma that never truly served as an inspiration for the party's activities or political doctrines.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by Santos Juliá, Los socialistas en la política española, 1879-1982 (Madrid, 1996), 507

<sup>2</sup> The bibliography on the Spanish transition is enormously vast. For more on the role of the Socialist Party during the transition see José María Maravall, The Transition to Democracy in Spain (London, 1982), Paul Preston, The Triumph of Democracy in Spain (London, 1987), Andrea Bonine Blanc, Spain's Transition to Democracy. The Politics of Constitution-Making (Columbia, 1987), Félix Tezanos, La transición española (Madrid, 1989), Josep María Colomer (ed.), La transición a la

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democracia: el modelo español (Barcelona, 1998). Election data was taken from the webpage of the Spanish Congress of Deputies, <<http://www.congreso.es/elecciones>>

<sup>3</sup> Javier Solana, “Entrevista con Javier Solana”, in Santos Juliá, Javier Pradera y Joaquín Prieto, Memoria de la Transición (Madrid, 1996), 268-269. For more about the debate on Marxism see Antonio García-Santesmases, “Evolución ideológica del socialismo en la España actual”, Sistema, 68/69 (1985), 61-78 and Santos Juliá, “La renuncia al marxismo”, in Juliá, Pradera y Prieto, Memoria de la transición, 272-275.

<sup>4</sup> These were the words of Pablo Castellano, one of the principal leaders, together with Francisco Bustelo and Luis Gómez Llorente of the critical wing of the PSOE that defended the Marxist definition of the party. Cited by Joaquín Prieto, “Catársis en el PSOE”, in Memoria de la Transición, 264.

<sup>5</sup> I have borrowed the expression “decaffeinated Marxism” from Paul Heywood, Marxism and the Failure of Organised Socialism in Spain, 1879-1936 (Cambridge, 2003), ch.1.

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Liebknecht, “Zur Schutz und Trutz”, cited by Brigitte Emig, Die Veredelung des Arbeiters. Sozialdemokratie als Kulturbewegung, (Frankfurt, 1980), 184. In her book, Emig analyses in detail the German Social-Democratic theory of two worlds and the role that this theory played in the development of working-class culture, on the one hand and the influence that it had on Socialist parties in other countries, on the other.

<sup>7</sup> This well-known phrase from the Gotha Programme can be found in Karl Marx, Kritik des Gothaer Programms [1891] (Berlin, 1986), 32.

<sup>8</sup> Pablo Iglesias, “El Partido Socialista en España”, in La España moderna, V (1897), 23. It has frequently been said that late 19th-century Spanish Socialism was more Guesdist (due to the influence of the French Socialist Jules Guesde) than Marxist in nature (Heywood, Marxism and the Failure, 6 and ff.; Luis Arranz, “El guesdismo de Pablo Iglesias en los informes de la Comisión de Reformas Sociales”, Estudios de Historia Social, 8-9 (1979), 207-214.). It is true that Pablo Iglesias became a Marxist after reading the works of Guesde, as very few works by Marx had been translated into Spanish at that time (Jacques Maurice, “Sobre la penetración del marxismo en España”, Estudios de

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Historial Social, 8-9 (1979), 65-74). However, as regards the theory of two worlds, it would be more correct to say that the proclamation of the Gotha Programme, criticized by Marx, entered Spain via Guesde. According to the Gotha Programme, all classes, with the exception of the proletariat, are a reactionary mass. The PSOE simply followed the principles of German Social Democracy to the word. Thus we cannot speak of a Guesdist PSOE, at least in reference to the notion of two worlds - one of the key doctrines of the early PSOE. A detailed analysis of the beginnings of the PSOE at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be found in Richard Gillespie, The Spanish Socialist Party, (Oxford, 1989), Ramón Alquézar y Josep Térmes, Historia del socialismo español. Vol. 1: 1870-1909 (Barcelona, 1983) and Heywood, Marxims and the failure, ch. 1. However, none of these works pays sufficient attention to the influence that the SPD doctrine of the two worlds had on the PSOE.

<sup>9</sup> José Luis Martín Ramos, “El socialismo español”, (Barcelona, 2001), 859. [The work by Martín Ramos appears in the Appendix to the book by David Sasoon, Cien años de socialismo, (Barcelona, 2001), which is the translation of David Sasoon, One Hundred Years of Socialism (London, 1996)]. In order to learn more about this period of history of the PSOE from the perspective of those who played a pivotal role in the events see Antonio García Quejido et al., Pensamiento socialista español a comienzos de siglo, Manuel Pérez Ledesma (ed.), (Madrid, 1975).

<sup>10</sup> From 26-30 July 1909 an uprising occurred in Barcelona (what is known as the Semana Trágica) against the call-up of working-class reservists for the colonial war in Morocco. The conservative government of Antonio Maura repressed the uprising, ordering the execution by firing squad of the Anarchist teacher and pedagogue Ferrer i Guardia. The crisis that ensued ultimately led to the government's downfall. For more on the events of the Tragic Week and its importance to the alliance between Republicans and Socialists see Joan Connelly, The Tragic Week (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), Robert Vincent, “La Protestation Universelle’. Lors de l’execution de Ferrer : Les manisfetations d’octobre 1909”, Revue d’Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine 36 (1989), 245-265 and José Luis Comellas, Del 98 a la Semana Trágica (Madrid, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Antonio Robles, “Modernización y revolución: socialistas y republicanos en la España de entresiglos”, in José Álvarez Junco (ed.), Populismo, caudillaje y discurso, (Madrid, 1986), 129-158,

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Antonio Robles, “La Conjunción Republicano-Socialista: una síntesis de liberalismo y socialismo”, Ayer, 54 (2004), 97-127.

<sup>12</sup> Heywood, Marxism and the failure, 20. Heywood analyzes the Republican influence on Socialism in Spain. However, he does not delve at length into the three elements that I am going to stress here (rejection of the theory of two worlds, the agrarian problem and federalism), all of which are crucial to understanding the ideological “rearmament” of the PSOE at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This rearmament would influence Spanish Socialism until González took office.

<sup>13</sup> See the classic work by Edward Malefakis, Agrarian Reform and Peasant Revolution in Spain (New Haven, 1970).

<sup>14</sup> Julián Besteiro, El Socialista, 27 December 1918.

<sup>15</sup> Pablo Iglesias, El Socialista, 2 August 1917.

<sup>16</sup> Pablo Iglesias, El socialista, 22 November 1918.

<sup>17</sup> The First Spanish Republic was short lived: from February 1873 to December 1874. See Raymond Carr, España: de la Restauración a la democracia, 1875-1980, (Barcelona, 1983), 19-37 [Modern Spain 1875-1980 (Oxford, 1980)].

<sup>18</sup> Here I follow Antonio Elorza, “Ideología obrera en Madrid: republicanos e internacionales” in Antonio Elorza y Martha Ralle (eds.), La formación del PSOE, (Barcelona, 1989) 19-20, with the exception of the first point. Regarding the parallelisms between Republicans and Libertarians he states the following: “a) A vision of society with a tendency for bipolar counterpoints: despotism versus liberty, reaction versus liberation...poverty versus wealth”. I believe that it is more appropriate to present these similarities as I have done, since it seems clear that the Spanish Republicans and Libertarians inherited the concept of freedom as non-domination from classic Republicanism -the possibility of living with masters of no kind, as defined by Philippe Pettit, Republicanism (Oxford, 1997), 31.

<sup>19</sup> Fernando Garrido, La Igualdad, 11 November 1868. Fernando Garrido (1821-1883) was a well-known Republican, Federalist and Radical Democrat that disseminated Fourier’s ideas in Spain.

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<sup>20</sup> Joaquín Maurín, L'anarcho-syndicalisme en Espagne (Paris, 1924), 36. The quote by Maurín, one of the most prominent Communist leaders of the twenties and thirties, reads: "They are Federalists, they invoke freedom at every instant, they admire the French Revolution and maintain close relations with the Republicans, leaving aside Socialists and Communists".

<sup>21</sup> Paloma Biglinio, El socialismo español y la cuestión agraria, 1890-1936 (Madrid, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> Andrés de Blas Guerrero, Tradición republicana y nacionalismo español, 1876-1930 (Madrid, 1991) and José Álvarez Junco, "'Los amantes de la libertad': la cultura republicana española a principios del siglo XX", in Nigel Townson (ed.), El republicanismo en España (1830-1977), (Madrid, 1994), 265-292.

<sup>23</sup> Pablo Iglesias, El Socialista, 28 March 1918.

<sup>24</sup> Pablo Iglesias, El Socialista, 31 October 1925.

<sup>25</sup> Pablo Iglesias, El Socialista, 28 June 1925.

<sup>26</sup> Antonio Elorza, "Los esquemas socialistas en Pablo Iglesias (1884-1925)", in Antonio Elorza y Martha Ralle, La formación del PSOE, 346.

<sup>27</sup> Francisco Largo Caballero, "La Unión General y el Partido Socialista contestan al Directorio", El Socialista, 1 October 1923.

<sup>28</sup> See Shlomo Ben-Ami, Fascism from above. The dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in Spain (Oxford, 1983) 67.

<sup>29</sup> José Luis Martín Ramos, "El socialismo español", (Barcelona, 2001), 865.

<sup>30</sup> The bibliography on the birth of the Second Spanish Republic is enormously vast. However, the book by Shlomo Ben Ami, Los orígenes de la Segunda República, (Madrid, 1990) merits special attention.

<sup>31</sup> Interview of Julián Besteiro, El Sol, 3 June 1931.

<sup>32</sup> Santos Juliá, Los socialistas en la política, 149.

<sup>33</sup> On Besteiro's position see Emilio Lamo, Filosofía y política en Julián Besteiro (Madrid, 1973) and on Prieto see José Carlos Gibaja, Indalecio Prieto y el socialismo español (Madrid, 1995).

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<sup>34</sup> “Los socialistas en el gobierno”, El socialista, 8 August 1931. Javier Tusell, *Las constituyentes de 1931: unas elecciones de transición* (Madrid, 1982).

<sup>35</sup> Luis Jiménez de Asúa, “Discurso ante las Cortes presentando el proyecto de Constitución”, 27 August 1931, <<http://er.users.netlink.co.uk/biblio/consrepu/jzasua.htm>>

<sup>36</sup> On the relationships between the Socialist Party and Azaña’s republican party see Gabriel Jackson, Costa, Azaña, el Frente Popular y otros ensayos (Madrid, 1976) and Santos Juliá, Manuel Azaña, una biografía política. Del Ateneo al Palacio Nacional (Madrid, 1990).

<sup>37</sup> Gabriel Jackson, La república española y la guerra civil 1931-1939 (Barcelona, 1979), 191 [The Spanish Republic and the Civil War (1931-1939) (Princeton, 1965)].

<sup>38</sup> Martín Ramos, “El socialismo español”, 922.

<sup>39</sup> “As Felipe González wouldn’t fail to recall in the 28th Congress, more public posts were held by members of the PSOE in April 1979 than registered activists in 1976”, Santos Juliá, Los socialistas en la política, 541.

<sup>40</sup> According to Alfonso Guerra -Felipe González’s right-hand man and Vice Prime Minister from 1982 to 1991- “What most nettled the Socialist Party was the existence of a majority-elected Senate, where the King had the power to name 50 senators. The PSOE considered this unacceptable, but we had to give in and accept it as a lesser evil.” Cited by Braulio Gómez (personal interview), ‘El control político de los procesos constituyentes. Los casos de España y Portugal’ (Complutense University of Madrid, PhD thesis, 2006), 121. The Senate issue, as we saw in the previous quote by Luis Jiménez de Asúa, was central to the Republican ideology of the PSOE prior to the Civil War. The acceptance not only of a two-chamber system, but of a Senate designed to ensure a transition that would not alienate the Francoists was one of the crucial aspects of the PSOE’s renouncement of its Republican tradition. Whether or not they were forced to do so is another question.

<sup>41</sup> On 23 February 1981 members of the Guardia Civil occupied the Parliament, retaining the members of the parliament throughout the night. At the same time, the Capitan General of the Military

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Region of Valencia brought tanks out onto the streets of the city. Those taking part in the coup turned themselves in the next day.

<sup>42</sup> The theoretical weakness of the Spanish liberal socialism is stressed by Ignacio Sotelo, Los socialistas en el poder (Madrid, 1986), 239-240.

<sup>43</sup> “Entrevista a Carlos Solchaga”, Memoria de la Transición, 386.

<sup>44</sup> According to Nicolás Redondo, head leader of the UGT who supported González for Party Secretary in 1974, “Felipe was fundamental to disarming the left and putting the right in power” (“Entrevista a Nicolás Redondo”, Memoria de la Transición, 433). See Robert Fishman, Organización obrera y retorno a la democracia (Madrid, 1996), 301-307, to understand the conflicts between UGT and PSOE during the Spanish Transition to democracy [Fishman, Working-class Organization and the Return to Democracy in Spain (Cornell, 1990)].