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- The Liberals who came to dominate Patriot Spain's political life during its War of Independence against Napoleon were much exercised by what they saw as the need to banish ignorance, superstition and servility from the lives of ordinary Spaniards. Those Spaniards who supported Napoleon's puppet regime, the so-called *afrancesados*, shared exactly the same sentiment. Both factions were a product of the Enlightenment, yet in practical terms both were also violently compromised by the ferocity of the war. The Liberals exploited a patriotic resistance to the invader which never died out by helping themselves to power and imposing a reform programme on Spain, whilst the *afrancesados* threw in their lot with Napoleon in a misguided belief in his desire to regenerate their country. One of the major differences in their respective approaches was policy towards the Church. Both factions nurtured a deep hostility towards the Inquisition, and both also sought to reduce the excessive temporal power enjoyed by the Church in regard to land ownership and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. But the puppet regime of Napoleon was far more aggressively anti-clerical, all the more so as so much of the Patriot guerrilla resistance seemed to centre on priests. The Liberals, on the other hand, sought to mobilise the traditional authority of the Church to indoctrinate the masses of churchgoers in the new ideals of liberalism. These ideals were enshrined in the iconic Constitution of 1812, an unwieldy document which nonetheless proposed a unitary State, liberal economic freedom, and an indirect form of suffrage based on property franchise which guaranteed the political domination of the liberal elite. Social control was also shored up by the explicit provision in the Constitution accepting the religious monopoly of the Catholic Church. It was therefore hoped that the much-maligned despotism of the "throne and altar" would be supplanted by the regenerative union of "Constitution and altar". Thus the Spanish cultural filter bestowed Spanish Liberalism with an intolerant confessionalism, in tandem with the other side of this coin, an intolerant anticlericalism¹.

- 2 Soon after the Constitution was promulgated, priests across Patriot Spain were exhorted to teach classes of constitutional catechism. With some exceptions, this call went unheeded, as most parish priests, if not virulently anti-liberal, were at least reluctant to teach a doctrine which restricted the powers of the Church to spiritual affairs whilst there was great ambivalence about reducing the powers of the king to a British-style constitutional monarchy. Thus the Spanish Church would grapple with an ideological quandary which ranged from ambivalence towards liberalism to outright hostility to it, and which would box the institution into a cultural ghetto until the mid-nineteenth century². The task of indoctrination via classes of constitutional catechism thus fell to salaried liberal placemen and teachers. It appears that wherever local authorities in Patriot Spain sponsored classes of constitutional catechism (and it is clear that most did not), the level of commitment was on three levels which we might call provisional, enthusiastic and obligatory.
- 3 An example of the provisional is offered in an article written by an anonymous “friend of popular education” which he submitted to a liberal newspaper at the end of 1813. The article relates his recent visit to the Andalusian village of Casa-Bermeja where he discovered weekly classes of constitutional catechism being held in the church. The author expresses surprise that instead of some old local rustic giving classes, it was actually a young lawyer sent from the city of Málaga³. Thus the liberal town was reaching out to the backward countryside. An example of enthusiastic commitment is provided by the case of the Castilian village of Horcajada de la Torre. Here the local mayor arranged for the church-bells to be sounded on feast-days after Mass to signal the opening of public lectures held in the town hall in which elected representatives held audience by explaining the rights and responsibilities of citizens under the Constitution, Cortes decrees, and by reading aloud liberal newspapers sent from Madrid. It was alleged that all householders in the village attended dutifully, some also bringing along their children⁴. Thus the liberal local authorities were promoting the indoctrination of the householders who had elected them. An example of what seems to have been obligatory indoctrination in constitutional catechism is provided by the northern Castilian town of Soria, whose political chief after the city’s liberation in 1813 was a die-hard liberal. A visitor to the town’s schoolrooms remarked how schoolchildren had their usual studies of grammar and arithmetic reduced in order to accommodate compulsory study of the Constitution of 1812. When the political chief made an inspection of the progress of political indoctrination, 180 children were assembled to honour his visit by parroting obscure articles of the Constitution in unison, after which the young charges were rewarded with sweets and ribbons⁵.
- 4 Clearly, such diffusion of liberalism in hindsight must appear to have been in vain, for the returning King Fernando VII managed to stage a classic coup d’etat in May 1814 which abolished the Constitution without any significant popular protest. But the previous example of children being induced to learn the Constitution by rote is symptomatic of a wider phenomenon in the early indoctrination of liberalism in Spain. That is, the diffusion of what we would now call propaganda in the press, radical clubs, and classes of constitutional catechism through *repetition* rather than reasoning. The distinguished scholar of crowd psychology, Serge Moscovici, published a book in 1985 which aimed to provide psychological rather than social explanations for the ineffectiveness of crowds in European history. I intend now to apply some of his findings to our discussion of popular radicalism in early nineteenth-century Spain.

- 5 Repeating a message to a crowd (in the classroom, club, or in newspapers), or having a crowd repeat a message (in classes of constitutional catechism), proves to be a more effective method of mass indoctrination than would an appeal to a crowd's power of reasoning. If a crowd hears the same thing over and over again it begins to feel it confirmed by having heard it from different people in different places⁶. Such ubiquitous propaganda can even be effective when applied to diametrically opposed concepts and absurd juxtapositions. The tarring with the same brush of "Jews" and "Communists" in Nazi Germany, and the idealisation of "National Socialism" are a case in point. An individual would see the contradictions of such terminology, but the mindless crowd is induced to accept it as part of some unified whole. Such "automatic thinking" of the crowd is made possible by a rhetoric which puts together contradictory and mutually exclusive facts and images which produce their desired effect because the crowd is indifferent to these contradictions⁷. Indeed it appears that the twisting of logic gives an air of mystery and confers some sort of extra authority on them. The unruly 384 articles of the Spanish Constitution of 1812 are our case in point. Freedom of the press was granted, but with the vague proviso that it should be interpreted in accordance with the law. Sovereignty of the nation was proclaimed as self-evident in light of what was seen as a people's struggle against the forces of Napoleon. Yet even if we do accept (and there is recent argument to the contrary⁸) the myth that the 1808-14 conflagration was indeed a people's war, the people were certainly not fighting for liberalism, whilst the King in 1814 had little difficulty in abrogating the "national will". Moreover, the exclusion from voting rights of servants and day labourers is proof which counters late nineteenth-century romanticisation of the Constitution by anarchists as a shock force of democracy. On the contrary, early nineteenth-century Spanish liberals were deeply hostile to what they saw as the dangerous "jacobin" chaos of democracy, whilst even the radical, or *exaltado*, wing of the liberals which emerged during the 1820-1823 Triennium, would wax lyrical about the need to establish a "sensible" liberty ("una libertad bien entendida").
- 6 Why then did the Constitution of 1812 become such a perennial rallying-cry of Spanish radicalism? Why was it both a legend in its own lifetime and a venerable inspiration for political change until well into the twentieth century? Part of the reason must lie in the circumstances of its promulgation during Spain's war against Napoleon. Whereas France had her Napoleons and Britain her Nelsons and Wellingtons as objects for national myth-making, Spain's uprising of 1808 gave her a myth of her heroic "people". The Constitution became diffused as the symbolic weapon which embodied the people's struggle. This union of Constitution and people was all the more palatable because unlike in Britain or France, there were no obvious army commanders available as national heroes, and the Spanish regular armies suffered both poor performance and leadership when compared both with their Anglo-Portuguese allies and their French enemies. As one contemporary polemicist, the "Spanish Robespierre", put it, Spain's incompetent generals were blocking the career path of the damned rankers who would outsmart them if they were only allowed to follow the unprecedented military policy of the French Revolution which provided for army promotion to be generally based on merit⁹. In fact, Spain did have heroes of a sort in the form of her guerrilla leaders, sons of the people like Espoz y Mina and El Empecinado. But these were imperfect models for most were opportunistic in their support for liberalism (Espoz y Mina is famously alleged to have made a show of executing a copy of the Constitution in 1814 in his ill-fated bid to curry favour with the king), whilst recent research has shown that the

guerrillas often alienated Spanish communities because of the demands they made upon them¹⁰. Better a flawed document, then, than a flawed caudillo. Fundamentally, the Constitution was held up as a symbol for which good Spaniards would kill and be killed, in much the same way as Napoleon at the end of the revolutionary period in France gave back to the masses the object of worship they had lacked in the wake of de-Christianisation, and for which lives would be sacrificed.

- 7 But in addition to the catharsis of war, the Constitution also endured as the flagship of Spanish radical liberalism because of the methods by which it was diffused. Priests were exhorted to preach the Constitution from the pulpit not only because the church tended to be the only amenable public building in a typical Spanish village, but also because it was hoped that the traditional mystique and authority of the Church might bestow a sacred legitimacy on the new current of liberalism. In the secular sphere, meanwhile, indoctrination thrived on confusion. Contrary to what might be expected, the simple was tailored to the elite whilst the complex was tailored to the crowd. For example, newspapers would regularly print question-and-answer catechisms based on imaginary conversations between a citizen and a constitutional expert. Invariably these would conclude with the doctrine that sovereignty resides in the people as guaranteed by the Constitution and in defence against the arbitrary forces of despotism. Although these were simple and concise teachings, they were directly accessible only to a literate minority. The impenetrable articles of the Constitution, on the other hand, spawned a veritable golden age of oratory which would last until the regency of Espartero in the early 1840s. During the second reestablishment of liberal rule in 1833, the poet Mariano José de Larra put his finger on this when he wrote:

In our vulgar language we are experiencing phrases which succeed in being born at the right time and spread throughout a whole nation ... in political vocabulary, above all ... it takes only one word to fall from the lips of an orator in his small circle, and a great number of people, anxious for words, pick it up, spread it by word of mouth, and with the speed of an electric bolt a larger number of living machines repeat and consecrate it, *most times without understanding it* (my emphasis), and always failing to calculate that it sometimes only takes one word to raise a mob, inflame passions, and so cause a revolution¹¹.

- 8 Rote-learning of the Constitution and the spread of abstract radical concepts, therefore, did not have to make sense, for crowd psychology teaches us that individuals are social beings, and the intelligence with which they accredit themselves as individuals gets watered down when they form part of a social group, sometimes to the extent they end up doing and supporting things which as individuals they would never countenance¹².
- 9 Early nineteenth-century Spanish liberalism thus provided fertile ground for the radical demagogue. Our final case in point in this regard concerns the activities of Pablo López, the “Cripple of Málaga” (Cojo de Málaga), a tailor of humble origins who by 1813 had managed to transform himself into the foremost leader of Madrid popular radicalism. After good references had allowed him to win the favour of the radical clubs of Cádiz, López followed the entourage of the Cortes in its 1813 relocation to Madrid. An account of his activities during the final year of war and liberal rule can be pieced together from the witness statements of fellow popular radicals arrested after the reimposition of absolutism. The Cripple of Málaga was a regular café demagogue whose main base was the famous *Fontana de Oro*, also the haunt of the then radical Cortes deputy, the Count of Toreno, who according to common knowledge at the time would

pay him to incite the mob¹³. Such rent-a-mob activities were focused both inside and outside the Cortes. Inside, López would attend the viewing galleries and rally his dozens, perhaps hundreds, of supporters to heckle the speeches of the conservatives “servile” deputies and to praise those of the liberals. As the liberals increasingly failed to intimidate their opponents inside the Cortes, López became adept at appealing to the crowds on the streets of the capital. This he managed by maintaining a private musical band which would strike up patriotic tunes whilst accompanying him on his forays to the houses of the deputies, offering abuse outside the doors of the conservative serviles, and praise outside those of the liberals. In addition to this spectacle, the Cripple would employ the same musicians as bodyguards and prompters during his daily demagogic speeches which he made in the Puerta del Sol¹⁴. His repetitive use of contradictory abstracts already displayed in the classes of constitutional catechism was accompanied by a heartier appeal to gut instincts, citing patriotism, honour, desire, and treachery, emotions played upon by all demagogues. Our crowd psychology analysis, however, also reveals how venue is prepared by the demagogue in order to guarantee a suggestible and unthinking audience. López proselytised on Madrid’s busy streets, in its popular cafés, and in its public squares. Yet all of these places are the worst possible places for politics, because – unlike the privacy of a committee room – the confusion of their roles and the comings and goings of people allow much room for suggestion, but little room for reason¹⁵. Pablo López was so effective as the kingmaker of Madrid politics that when the real King mounted his reactionary coup, the Andalusian tailor’s name topped the list of subversives to be arrested.

- 10 López would survive his imprisonment and would be rehabilitated with awards and pensions by a grateful Cortes after the liberal army risings of 1820 restored constitutional rule to Spain¹⁶. He had endured as either a popular hero or an infamous demagogue during his long years of captivity. Moreover, classes of constitutional catechism would spread in real earnest during the Triennium. The 1833-1840 Carlist War would witness the real breakthrough of a radical popular political culture in Spain, substantially due – as the much more limited exposure to liberalism during the struggle against Napoleon testifies – to the experience of war. The ease with which reactionary absolutism was restored in 1814, and again in 1823, would suggest that radical liberalism was a weak force in Spain. This is substantially true because Spain remained a largely apolitical country whose power structures were made up of unaccountable vertical networks of political and economic dependency which allowed “caciques” to thrive, and demagogic adventurers to manoeuvre. But it was precisely this set of circumstances which dictated the nature of Spain’s distorted support for radicalism. It would not be until the drawn-out conflict and deep economic changes of the First Carlist War that an organic popular radicalism would be born.

NOTES

1. Javier Fernández Sebastián and Juan Francisco Fuentes (eds.), *Diccionario político y social del siglo XIX español*, (Madrid 2002), p. 413-428.

2. Ariel, *La Iglesia Española ante la Revolución Liberal*, (Madrid 1971).
 3. *El Universal*, 3rd January 1814.
 4. *El Universal*, 1st February 1814.
 5. *El Universal*, 25th February 1814.
 6. Serge Moscovici, *The age of the crowd: A historical treatise on mass psychology*, (Cambridge 1985), p. 146-148.
 7. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
 8. See Charles J. Esdaile (2004).
 9. *El Robespierre español (Amigo de las Leyes: o Cuestiones Atrevidas sobre la España*, No. 1, (Cádiz 1811), p. 27.
 10. See Charles J. Esdaile (2004).
- En este país hay en el lenguaje vulgar frases afortunadas que nacen en buena hora y se derraman por toda una nación ... en el vocabulario político, sobre todo ... Cae una palabra de los labios de un perorador en un círculo, y un gran pueblo, ansioso de palabras, la recoge, la pasa de boca en boca, y con la rapidez del golpe eléctrico un crecido número de máquinas vivientes la repite y la consagra, *las más veces sin entenderla*, y siempre sin calcular que una palabra sola es a veces palanca suficiente a levantar la muchedumbre, inflamar los ánimos y causar en las cosas una revolución. **(My translation)**
11. *La Revista Española*, 30th May 1833, cited in Javier Fernández Sebastián and Juan Francisco Fuentes (eds.), *Diccionario político*, p. 7.
 12. Moscovici, *op. cit.*, p. 13-19.
 13. A.C.D., *Causa de Pablo López, conocido por el Cojo de Málaga*, Ampliación de la declaración de Francisco Molle, 17th August 1814.
 14. A.C.D., *Causa de Pablo López, conocido por el Cojo de Málaga*, testimony of Juan Antonio Prieto Navamuel on events in the Cortes, 23rd July 1814.
 15. Moscovici, p. 100.
 16. *Diario de Sesiones*, 7th November 1820, cited in Juan Romero Alpuente, *Historia de la Revolución Española y Otros Escritos*, (ed. Alberto Gil Novales), (Madrid 1989), Vol. I, p. 304.