

The revolutionary left and the transition: dynamics and processes

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to present, in rough outlines, the relationship between the Spanish revolutionary left and the transition process in Spain, and their mutual impact on each other. Moreover, we also address, in a synthetic way, the stages of formation, boom, and decline in the various radical forces. These clusters shared ideologies, expectations, and political cultures, as well as approaches, proposals, and forms of operation, with their homonymous European counterparts. They shared a common background upon which the dictatorship and experience in the Spanish context also left a mark, and this strongly determined the forms of action and the organisational structure of several groups which considered the anti-Francoist fight a synonym for the revolutionary fight. Their evolutionary cycle was, as a whole, linked to the ups and downs of political change during the Franco regime, and in its crisis they represented a crucial motor for social agitation and mobilisation. The rise of democracy in Spain is still developing, albeit in parallel to the decline of these collectives. After successive electoral failures and their conversion into the extra-parliamentary left, these various groups have gone into a rapid process of descent in which widespread weakening, fusions, sectarianism, and dissolution are combined in all their possible forms.

Keywords: revolutionary left, Spanish transition, democratic breakdown, social mobilisation.

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The revolts and new proposals that shook the European and North American sociopolitical panorama last century in the 1960s and 1970s arose from the accumulated discontent and new forms of collective action that had been slowly solidifying. Using a very radical discourse, they questioned the legitimacy of the capitalist order, defended other ways of understanding the world and, in turn, presented themselves as an alternative to the current model.

One faction of this discontent was conveyed through the so-called new social movements, which were highly critical of the model of society that had been imposed in the Western world after the Second World War (Calle, 2005, p. 24–27). Another was constructed around the betrayal of the revolutionary ideal by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and gave way to the different groups of the so-called extreme left or revolutionary left. In contrast to the new social

movements, these groups were distinguished by a closed ideology that was strongly internally redirected, and by a hierarchical structure in which individuals subordinated to benefit the collective community; characteristics that would become notably accentuated in contexts where iron dictatorships with a bitter fascist flavour prevailed, such as in Spain and Portugal.

The Spanish revolutionary left were the offspring of this tumultuous time; directly or indirectly influenced by the aforementioned sociopolitical movements, they shared ideologies, expectations, and political cultures with their European counterparts and their approaches, proposals, and forms of action were similar. Four attributes that emanate directly from Lenin's school of thought distinguished them at the ideological level: (1) their revolutionary character, which sought to radically and completely transform the social order; (2) the party was conceived as a nucleus of professional revolutionaries who were representing and leading the working class; (3) their rejection of bourgeois democracy as an intermediate stage on the road to socialism; (4) and anti-imperialism, understood as an affinity with revolutionary struggles and the anticolonial movements of the third world, in which they saw a new hope for the failed revolution in the West. Likewise, these groups shared a working-class ideology with radical European organisations—which they often put into practice—which placed the proletariat as the ideal class which they must align themselves with. Finally, all of them also had a similar organisational model which combined up to three central attributes; the party was understood as: (1) a tool to raise awareness and political struggle; (2) a vanguard of the proletariat comprising its most revolutionary elements; (3) a strong, centralised, and hierarchical structure (democratic centralism), which practices rigorous discipline in the application of decisions, and total commitment and full dedication to the cause of its members.

The specific elements constituting the Spanish context and marked by the Franco regime acted upon this common international background. More precisely, the different organisations of the radical left emerged from the organised struggle against it this political

situation; an origin that places them inside the internal ruptures of the *Partido Comunista de España* (PCE; the Communist Party of Spain) or of ETA (an acronym for *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*— 'Basque Homeland and Liberty'), in adversarial organisations¹ or in working-class Catholicism. Its evolutionary cycle was also linked to the ups and downs of the political changes derived from the Franco regime crisis, in which they played an important role. These parties were generally formed between the late 1960s and early 1970s, and between 1973 and 1977 they experienced a brief but intense period of development, during which they were an important engine for social agitation and mobilisation. At this time, many of these organisations downgraded their revolutionary discourse so that they could claim the strategy of a democratic break as their own. But their progression was limited by the particular dynamics of the political change after Franco's death, which, after the 1977 elections, resulted in their rapid decline, and shortly after, saw them go into a generalised process of extinction.

The main objective of this article is to outline the main relationships between the Spanish revolutionary left and the transition process, the mutual impact they had on each other, and at the same time, to try to describe successive and synthetic stages of the formation, boom, and decline of these different radical forces.²

1 As summarised by Pérez Serrano (2013, p. 252 onwards), the so-called coalition organisations tried to unite all the tendencies of communism and libertarian Marxism that positioned themselves to the left of the PCE. Known generically as 'FELIPE', they comprised three parties that appeared between 1959 and 1960: the *Frente de Liberación Popular* (FLP; Popular Liberation Front), the *Front Obrer de Catalunya* (FOC; the Workers' Front of Catalonia), and *Euskadiko Sozialisten Batasuna* (ESBA; the Basque Socialist Union), which together sought to merge the tendencies of the new European left with the heterodox traditions of the Spanish revolution. With a brief and turbulent evolution, they disappeared in 1969, although their imprint is still evident in the revolutionary parties that were born out of their ashes.

2 This condensed article is based on my own materials (Cucó 2007a; 2007b; 2008a; 2008b; 2010; 2011; 2014; 2016) and on the contributions of other authors, among which I would like to highlight the only work available that provides a Spanish historiography on a subject that only now is starting to become less forgotten (among others, Causa, 2011; Laiz, 1995; Martínez, 2011; 2013; 2016; Pérez, 2016; Pérez, 2013; Sans, 2015; Wilhelmi, 2016).

FORMATION OF THE RADICAL LEFT IN SPAIN

The conditions of repression and secrecy in which the Spanish extreme left moved intensified the aforementioned adherence and militancy of their membership. As a former leader of the Communist Movement of Euskadi explained a few years ago, the militant commitment occupied every hour of his life at that time: “There were no Mondays or Sundays, no day, no night”; their dedication, he said, was complete. They were times of absolute devotion, of unrest, extreme risk, repression, and fear. The high degree of commitment that distinguished many of the young people engaged in the anti-Franco struggle was articulated with a strong collective sense that, according to Eugenio del Río (2012), relegated individuals [in favour of the group] and disregarded individual rights and freedoms. Their secrecy also deeply marked their courses of action and their organisational structure that, for security reasons, were built based on double and triple [intermediary] meetings, ‘flash mob’ demonstrations, political commissars, and sealed cells within the party. With the overlying clear conviction that a planned violent revolution was necessary. In the shadow of this conviction, the anti-Franco struggle then became synonymous with revolutionary struggle.

In addition to an important common substratum of ideology, praxis, and organisation marked by the sociopolitical scenario of the Franco regime, the groups of the Spanish extreme left shared two more specific features: the frequent relations with Europe and the vindicating impact of peripheral nationalisms. Indeed, on the one hand, in contrast to the relative isolation of its Portuguese counterparts (Cucó, 2007a), the Spanish revolutionary left maintained strong ties with the outside world during the dictatorship and, almost without exception, these groups and organisations recognise that they were influenced by the events of May 1968 in France. For example, for tactical reasons the *Movimiento Comunista* (MC; the Communist Movement) kept its core leaders in Parisian exile; as far as it was concerned, the influences of the new European left seemed assured. The case was similar for some of the Marxist-Leninist (m-l) organisations that emerged from the many other divisions of the

PCE: in addition to adopting a pro-Chinese thesis, militants were kept inside and outside the border and sometimes established close relationships with other m-l parties as well as with the Chinese embassies in Europe. Finally, with regard the Trotskyist parties, it is worth mentioning that one of their distinctive features was to cultivate meaningful international relationships. As a consequence, the Trotskyists have always had a solid international organisation that coordinates the activities of the different national groups, while simultaneously conveying and maintaining the Leninist spirit.

On the other hand, the influence that the nationalist movements exerted on the social, cultural, and political life of these Spanish groups, whose strength was renewed during the late-Francoist era, is evident. Both in superficial and profound ways, these movements would leave their mark on the whole of the political left (both the classical and revolutionary branches) that later developed in Spain, either in the traditional Spanish style or, on the contrary, in relation to peripheral nationalisms. This is how, with different degrees of conviction and effort, and with greater or lesser tensions and internal resistance, the different groups located on the left of the PCE and *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya* (PSUC; Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia) would generically defend the people’s right to self-determination, incorporating the notion of left-wing nationalism either with passion or indifference.

The different groups of the extreme Spanish left are built upon this common framework, and as already mentioned, these emerged from three different trains of thought. The nationalist origin is especially notable in the Basque and Catalan contexts, where different parties appeared which fought for so-called revolutionary nationalism.³ In the Basque Country, the origins of such organisations were the splits of the *Partido Nacionalist Vasco* (PNV; the Basque Nationalist

3 In the Spanish context, revolutionary nationalism advocated national and class liberation and the construction of a socialist society in the Catalan or Basque areas.

Party) and ETA in its early years, especially between 1966 and 1970. Specifically, from the dissensions in ETA during the first part of the 5th ETA Assembly from which *ETA-Berri* (New ETA)⁴ and *Komunistak*—MC parent organisations—would emerge. Later, in 1970, during the course of the 6th ETA Assembly, there would be a new break between the faction that backed revolutionary nationalism (which took the name ETA-VI), and another faction that would eventually evolve towards Trotskyism and fuse with the *Liga Comunista Revolucionaria* (LCR; Revolutionary Communist League; Caussa, 2011). In Catalonia, the *Partit Socialista d'Alliberament Nacional* (PSAN; the Socialist Party of National Liberation), was born out of the rupture of the *Front Nacional de Catalunya* (FNC; the National Front of Catalonia) at the end of the 1960s; a few years later, the PSAN would give rise to two new movements: the *Moviment de Defensa de la Terra* (MDT; Movement for the Defence of the Land) in 1984 and *Catalunya Lliure* (Free Catalonia) in 1989 (Caussa, 2011).

The PCE(m-l) was the first of the radical left political groups to break away from the PCE:⁵ it formed between 1964 and 1967 and at first it was pro-China, but later aligned itself with Albania. Shortly after, another front that included a military branch known by the initialism FRAP (*Frente Revolucionario Antifascista y*

Patriótico, translated as Revolutionary and Patriotic Antifascist Front) emerged from this splinter group and were active from 1971 to 1976. In this last year, the PCE(m-l) renounced its armed struggle and worked to create a dynamic of a unitary movement for the right to self-determination, the Republic⁶, and national independence. The *Organización de Marxistas Leninistas Españoles* (OMLE, the Organization of Marxist-Leninists if Spain) also appeared in the second half of the 1960s. It was founded by Spanish communists who had emigrated to Belgium, France, and Switzerland, and in 1975, became the Communist Party of Spain (reconstituted), known as the PCE(r). This new party also had an armed commission, the *Grupos de Resistencia Antifascista Primero de Octubre* (GRAPO, the First of October Anti-Fascist Resistance Groups) which was active from 1974 to 1979, and aimed to abort the opposition's negotiating strategy. But the fractures that gained the most weight on the revolutionary left emerged in Catalonia from the 1967 split of the '*Unidad*' (Unity) group within the PSUC, that successively gave rise to two Maoist groups: the *Organització Comunista d'Espanya (Bandera Roja)*—the OCE-BR, translated as the Communist Organisation of Spain (Red Flag) in 1968, and the Communist Party of Spain (international), known as the PCE(i) who were active between 1967 and 1971. The former achieved strong support from the *Comisiones Obreras* (CCOO; Workers' Commissions) [trade unions] and neighbourhood associations in Barcelona, but a significant number of its militants reintegrated with the PSUC in the mid-1970s. The latter grew in Catalonia and in the rest of Spain, and in 1975 it changed its name to *Partido del Trabajo de España* (PTE; the Party of Labour of Spain); from then on, and throughout the transition, it assumed the PCE's political strategy and became the most influential political force to [the PCE's] left.

Finally, among the movements with Catholic roots, on the one hand was the union *Acción Sindical de Trabajadores* (AST; Workers' Trade Union Action) which

4 As Consuelo Laiz (1995) points out, the foundational core of ETA-Berri was a nucleus of university students, in some cases of Christian origin, who were students of Marxism, influenced by the Cuban revolution, and who were hostile to the dictatorship. They wanted to explain the history of the Basque country in the absence of a nationalist influence they described as bourgeois and they were advocates of uniting the class conflict and for national affirmation. For a little more than a year, this group controlled part of ETA's leadership and presented a worker or Marxist tendency until, because of their labour movement, they were expelled from the group during the first part of the 5th ETA Assembly.

5 The parties highlighted here do not include those that Pérez Serrano classifies as "the Leninist and pro-Soviet dissidence", that is, the Communist Party of Spain (8th–9th congresses), the Spanish Communist Workers' Party, the Workers' Communist Party, the Communist Cells, or the Communist Party of the Peoples of Spain (2013, p. 271–273). With the exception of the latter, which survived for longer, all of these parties disappeared towards the middle of the 1980s.

6 *La Convención Republicana de los Pueblos de España* (CRPE; the Republican Convention of the Peoples of Spain), an organisation that would not be legalised until 1981.

was active between 1964 and 1969 and from which the *Organización Revolucionaria de los Trabajadores* (ORT; Workers' Revolutionary Organisation)—active from 1970 to 1979—later split off of. As Pérez Serrano (2013) points out, this group was not yet considered to constitute the real communist party, but rather, along with other related groups, was a key part of [the PCE's] origin. On the other hand, after the 1969 disintegration of the FLP⁷ some of its members who had been following the approach of Trotsky and other heterodox Marxists founded the Communism group (1969–1971), which in turn, would give rise to the LCR, the first Trotskyist party created in Spain, which was active between 1971 and 1991. This ideological reference and [the LCR's] refusal to participate in the opposition's unitary bodies were elements that distinguished it. It should also be noted that the LCR and the MC were the longest-lived parties of the Spanish revolutionary left. The *Organización de Izquierda Comunista de España* (OICE; Organisation of the Communist Left of Spain) was born later (1974–1979) and originated from the merger of several communist workers' circles in Catalonia and the Basque Country. This body was very critical of what they considered the instrumentalisation of the workers' movement by political parties and emphasised self-organisation among the proletariat and promoted the anticapitalistic workers' commissions and platforms that were later integrated into the CCOO; in the middle of a deep crisis at the end of the 1970s, the OICE absorbed the MC.

In short, the conditions of repression, secrecy, and isolation which were characteristic of the Franco dictatorship sharpened the profiles of the different groups comprising the Spanish revolutionary left. These movements also left their mark on certain specific processes which affected the country, such as the particular dynamics of political change after Franco's death and the rise of peripheral nationalisms. In preparation for their final struggle, the parties of the radical left often became closed-off worlds in which heroic attitudes, strict discipline, and total dedication to the cause were encouraged.

⁷ For more information about the FLP, see note 1.

THE CRISIS OF FRANCOISM: FROM THE DEATH OF THE DICTATOR TO THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

As we know, Franco's death in November 1975 did not mean the end of his regime; rather, it aggravated the crisis in the political system which anti-Francoist forces had caused. In this turbulent scenario, the clandestine organisations to the left of the PCE would later play an important role. Despite being heavily repressed, they continued to notably stimulate the escalation of social agitation and mobilisation, while simultaneously actively participating in the controversies and processes related to dismantling and renewing the Francoist political apparatus. From the beginning of the transition, unrest among the workers' movement had been increasing⁸. As Wilhelmi points out,

Despite being illegal, strikes grew in number, duration, and the number of participants, and increasingly included more political content, for instance, about amnesty and freedom. Sectors such as education, health, hospitality, and commerce joined [the protests] of the most demanding sectors—metal, construction, mining, and textiles (Wilhelmi, 2016, p. 55).

In this process, the groups of the revolutionary left were gaining influence, without unseating the PCE-PSUC, which continued to be the most important party. Therefore, the CCOO was the main organisational force and it developed more as a movement than as a classical-style trade union, while also becoming increasingly politicised and radicalised. Within [the CCOO], there were frequent and noteworthy confrontations between the PCE-PSUC and the different parties of the revolutionary left, and these often centred around a strategic issue: the dilemma between pacifying or stopping the mobilisation as

⁸ By transition, we understand the period of contemporary Spanish history in which the country underwent the process of leaving behind the dictatorial regime of General Franco and came to be governed by a constitution that restored parliamentary democracy. There is some consensus that the transition started upon event of General Franco's death on 20 November 1975 and that it concluded on 29 December 1978 when the new Constitution came into force.

advocated by the former, or intensifying these sectoral conflicts, as expounded by the latter. Indeed, the CCOO itself was no stranger to this type of confrontation in the struggle for control.

In some areas of Barcelona and Madrid, and especially in the Basque Country and Navarre, the influence of the radical left was almost total. Specifically, in the latter two territories, the parties of the revolutionary left⁹ played a huge role which, as Pérez Pérez (2016) asserts, was much higher than their real strength. This was possible thanks to the effective presence of its activists both in the workplace and in neighbourhoods, and to the new social movements that occupied the streets to demand several different changes. The most controversial year of all was 1976: Labour conflicts exploded and overflowed into trade union organisations which, at the time, were themselves working in a decidedly semi-clandestine way. The case of the industrial belt of Vitoria was paradigmatic: the conflicts that took place between December 1975 and March 1976 resulted in 60 seriously injured workers and five deaths, a repression that provoked a general strike and two further deaths. However, direct involvement of radical left activists was fundamental to other types of mobilisations that also achieved very high levels of participation, such as the strong opposition mounted against the start-up of the Lemoiz nuclear power plant, which became a symbol of the Basque transition. It should also be noted that all this unrest was inseparably mixed with [the agitation] derived from the Basque question.

The revolutionary parties also played a decisive role in the origin and development of conflicts in certain sectors of production. The cases of the two general construction strikes that took place in València and its province between 1976 and 1977 illustrate this

generalised phenomenon well.¹⁰ As highlighted by an activist from the OICE (Asunción, 2015), the members of Anti-capitalist CCOO [movements] had been waiting for this opportunity—which allowed them to evaluate the capacity of the sector's workers to fight and the influence of anti-capitalist alternatives—for a long time. Assessing the situation from a distance, what stands out to Asunción (the protagonist of the following quotation), is the massive character of the strikes, their organisational assembly, and the strong fighting spirit that animated the revolutionary activists; an attitude and an awareness that he himself contrasts with that of the majority of workers:

We were communists, revolutionaries always willing to lose our jobs. The value of our private outcomes was not the value of the working class. Marxists first considered economic class consciousness, which consisted of the concessions of the agreement, improvements in wages, safety, and hygiene at work, etc. and we acted on this consciousness to then give the working class a level of political [weight]. Thus, this was the level of economic consciousness that most of the workers had at the time. There was a lot of striking, many days of strikes, just to end in a decision... The workers, in the end, asked: "What have we achieved?". But they were referring to economic conquests. Judging the value of political conquests or class consciousness was something we did, not the working class (Asunción, 2015, p. 244–245).

In keeping with these pretensions and ideas, the different currents of the revolutionary left tried to extend the general political strikes that, especially after 1976, paralysed cities, counties, and even entire provinces, throughout the Spanish territory. However, they did not manage to link citizenship, in a general way, with two of the basic reasons that motivated their work: demands for rights, working conditions, and improved living conditions, and the political demands of dismantling of the Francoist state apparatus.

9 The presence of the PTE, the ORT, MC-EMK (*Euskadiko Mogimendu Komunist*, the Communist Movement of the Basque Country), LCR-LKI (*Liga Komunista Iraultzailea*, the Revolutionary Communist League of the Basque Country), and OICE stand out.

10 Specifically, the first strike took place between 14 and 27 January 1976, and the second, from the end of that year until February 1977.

In parallel, as already mentioned, the organisations on the extreme left actively participated in a wide range of movements that, at that time, moved the foundations of Spanish society; these included the neighbourhood, student, and feminist movements.¹¹ Focusing on the latter, it should be remembered that the moment of its (re)birth coincides with the beginning of the transition. Shortly after Franco died, in December 1975, the *Primeras Jornadas por la Liberación de la Mujer* (First Days of the Liberation of Women) took place in secret in Madrid. Two significant trends became publicly known during these days: one was defined as belonging to women and was represented by the *Movimiento Democrático de Mujeres* (MDM; the Women's Democratic Movement) and was closely linked to the PCE; the other, led by the Feminist Collective, openly presented itself as feminist (Abril and Miranda, 1978). Between these days and others held in Granada in 1979, there were important debates among Spanish feminists; the militants of several radical parties were involved in some polemics which would provoke an infamous rupture between independent and partisan feminism during the meeting in Granada. The segmentation present in the latter was evident in the militant feminists on the extreme left who adopted strategies of cooptation and had very different forms of organisation. Thus, following the example of the MDM, the ORT promoted the creation of formally independent women's organisations, such as the diverse *Asociación Democrática de la Mujer* (ADM; the Democratic Women's Association). In contrast, in terms of activism, other [parties] encouraged and participated in unitary feminist organisations. This was the strategy of the women in the MC: internally they had a hierarchy of women permeating the party's organisation, who rarely encouraged the parallel development of women's associations—on the contrary, they usually supported the creation of unitary assembly-like organisations.¹²

Regarding the politics of these groups, and also closely following Gonzalo Wilhelmi's explanation (2016), most of the revolutionary parties—including the ORT, PTE, PCE(m-l), MC, and LCR—considered that political democracy should influence the recognition of the right to self-determination by the peoples of Spain, an issue to which some added the judgment and punishment of those responsible for Franco's repression. Therefore, in the midst of an acute fragmentation, a good part of the revolutionary groups actively worked in favour of the democratic rupture. In other words, they favoured the constitution of a provisional government composed of all the opposition forces and that would decree an amnesty for political prisoners and guarantee people's freedoms until free elections could be held. The adoption of this strategy testifies to an important transformation in the ideology of these parties because, in essence, it required them to blur the boundaries of their revolutionary discourse. However, for the activists on the radical left, the democratic break continued to lead to profound social change, "which involved reducing inequalities, introducing democracy not only into institutions, but also into companies and transforming ways of living and working" (Wilhelmi, 2016, p. 157).

To achieve these objectives, the revolutionary organisations had three basic options: (1) integrate into the different existing unitary platforms; (2) create their own organisations; (3) stay on the margins of the opposition's spaces. The majority chose the first alternative. Two unitary platforms—that coexisted with others born in different state territories—stand out from among the Spanish movements: the *Junta Democrática de España* (JDE; the Democratic Junta of Spain) and the *Plataforma de Convergencia Democrática* (PCD; the Democratic Convergence Platform). The PCE took the first option and in so also integrated bodies including the PTE, CCOO, *Partido Socialista Popular* (PSP; the Popular Socialist Party), *Partido Socialista de Aragón* (PSA; the Socialist Party of Aragon), and the *Partido Socialista de Andalucía* (PA; the Socialist Party of Andalusia). The second initiative was chosen by the PSOE alongside the ORT, MC, and the *Partido Carlista* (Carlist Party). Very few organisations took this second

11 For an overview, in addition to the articles by Benjamín Tejerina and Pilar Toboso that appear in this monograph, we recommend consulting the excellent synthesis work of Gonzalo Wilhelmi (2016).

12 For a historiographic assessment of the main published studies, among others, consult the work of Isabel Segura (2013); for the specific case of the MC, see Cucó (2016).

option, although the PCE(m-l) was another one of them: it created an alternative to the aforementioned parties called the *Convención Republicana de los Pueblos de España* (CRPE; the Republican Convention of the Peoples of Spain). Finally, a few parties took the third option and opted to stay on the edges of the unitary platforms—for instance, the LCR, OICE, and PCE(r)—which argued that the bourgeois parties should necessarily be excluded from the process of democratic rupture.

As the transition progressed and political reform of the government became plausible, partisan activity also generally became more intense and competitive. But while the organisations of the majority left, from the PCE to the PSOE, as well as the socialist parties integrated into the Federation of Socialist Parties—the *Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya* (PSC; the Socialists' Party of Catalonia), *Partido Socialista del País Valenciano* (PSPV; the Socialist Party of the Valencian Country), PA, and PSA, etc.—did not hesitate to negotiate and make pacts, this was very difficult for the groups on the extreme left because of their revolutionary policies. These hinderances and the slowness of these latter groups facilitated their exclusion from the majority left and the democratic opposition forces' negotiations with the dictatorship's government.

In March 1976, two large platforms (the JDE and PCD) merged into the *Coordinación Democrática* (Democratic Convergence) platform, popularly known as *Platajunta*. From then on, the revolutionary left's situation became even more complicated. On the one hand, after the cessation of Arias Navarro as president of the Francoist government and his replacement by Adolfo Suárez, the PSOE explicitly renounced the democratic rupture, and simultaneously accepted that Suárez would direct the reform until free elections could be held. On the other hand, while the PCE desisted from leading a large social mobilisation and favoured the rupture, three members of [Platajunta]—the PSOE, PSP, and *Izquierda Democrática* (ID; the Democratic Left)—negotiated with the government outside of the

unitary platform. Finally, while in December of the same year the Francoist *Cortes* (parliament) approved the Law for Political Reform which would be submitted to a referendum soon after, [Platajunta] created a negotiating commission from which the radical left would be excluded. Thus, expelled from the game of alliances and rapidly losing prominence, the results of the first referendum (December 1976), and the first democratic elections that followed (June 1977), precipitated [the radical left's] crisis.

Indeed, according to the data regarding the referendum on political reform considered by Gonzalo Wilhelmi (2016, p. 140 and p. 164), 22% of the electorate abstained (a posture that the PCE and the parties to its left defended for different reasons), while the 'yes' votes achieved an overwhelming 97% in favour. Nonetheless, we must point out that not all the political groups [of the time] went to the 1977 elections on equal terms. In contrast to the main opposition parties, the extreme left had not been legalised and were still divided at the [time of the] elections; thus, the organisations that did choose to participate were very fragmented and did so under newly created initialisms. As several researchers unanimously highlight, the results were disappointing (Pérez, 2013; Cucó, 2016; Martínez, 2016; Wilhelmi, 2016, among others). None of the revolutionary left parties obtained representation in the [new] Spanish Parliament and the percentage of votes they obtained was quite low (both overall and individually): according to several estimates, it accounted for between 3.1% and 1.93% of the total votes (Maravall, 1978, p. 36; Wilhelmi, 2016, p. 163). The truth is that, in the words of Wilhelmi,

In general, the candidacies of the revolutionary left received fewer votes than [the number of] people who had attended their meetings and [this] verified the different degree of influence they had achieved when they addressed [the] sectors mobilised in the midst of conflict [compared to] when they tried to connect with the rest of society in an electoral campaign (Wilhelmi, 2016, p. 164).

The radical left then became an extra-parliamentary left and went into a short phase of generalised weakening in which every possible combination of merger, sectorisation, and dissolution were played out.

THE REVOLUTIONARY DECLINE

In addition to the revolutionary left's process of descent, the course that the developing constitutional process took immediately afterwards was another important obstacle. As for the Constitution itself, its aspirations were very far from the proposal that was created ad hoc by the parliamentary commission.¹³ Among the many points of disagreement, the parties to the left of the PCE-PSUC wanted a constitution that, in addition to formal equality, established a deep democracy that limited the socioeconomic inequalities of citizens. In addition, far from the essentialist idea of Spain contemplated by the *fathers* (and *mothers*) of the reformist Constitution, they also demanded a civic nation based on the will of its members, which implied the de facto right to self-determination. Moreover, another point of friction was added to the general differences the [revolutionary] left had with the majority left: the role that citizen participation should play both in the constituent process and in the new democracy. Nonetheless, despite sharing similar positions, the radical left was also divided at the time of the referendum (December 1978) and faced it defending contradictory positions of abstention and votes both in favour and against.¹⁴ In any case, the results of the consultation were broadly in favour of the proposal for the constitution presented by the Spanish Parliament, and so the postulates furthest to the left were again discarded.¹⁵

13 The parliamentary commission responsible for drafting the text of the constitutional opinion comprised members of the UCD, AP, PSOE, and PCE-PSUC.

14 According to Wilhelmi's data (2016, p. 255), with a total participation of 67% and approximately 33% abstentions, the 'yes' votes represented 88% and the 'no' votes, 10%.

15 Some parties, the MC for example, defended abstention; others such as the LCR and the PCE(m-l), requested the 'no' vote, while still others, such as the ORT and the PTE, asked for a 'yes' vote.

A few months later, successive general and municipal elections in 1979 intensified the cycle of isolation in which the revolutionary left was immersed which meant that they would again face the elections while divided on their ideals and strategies. Nor did the different parties' aspirations for the general elections (March of 1979) coincide. To the parties with the greatest following—including the PTE and ORT—[the general elections were] a decisive challenge in their new and determined gamble on parliamentary [participation]; but others, such as the MC and the LCR, adopted a more sceptical or distanced position. The results of these elections were slightly more favourable to the radical left than previous ones: overall, it obtained 4.6% of the total votes and one seat in the Spanish Congress [of Deputies],¹⁶ but the PTE and the ORT—the parties on the extreme left with the strongest parliamentary ambitions—were excluded.

In the municipal elections held in April of the same year, things were even worse. Although they tried, the ORT and PTE found it impossible to reach an electoral pact with the parties on the majority left and, in general, their results were disappointing. However, there were some remarkable variations for each party in the different territories. According to Gonzalo Wilhelmi, the radical left saw a nearly 30% reduction in its support, although it achieved 3.7% of the overall votes and a total of 832 councillors in Spanish municipalities (2016, p. 260 and p. 261). What happened next is easy to summarise. At the end of the 1970s only a few radical parties were still active, and their evolution considerably varied. On the one hand, the decline of the PTE and the ORT was almost immediate. After seeing their ambitious electoral expectations unfulfilled, they began a rapid process of mergers that culminated in the creation of a new party in the same year: the *Partido de los Trabajadores* (PT; the Workers' Party), which itself only survived for a

16 This seat was for Fernando Sagaseta, a member of the *Unión del Pueblo Canario* (UPC; the Canarian People's Union), a coalition of communist, separatist, and leftist nationalist political parties from the Canary Islands that existed between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s.

very short time. In 1980, as Pérez Serrano summarised, “despite being the leading extra-parliamentary force, it languished and was dissolved due to its circumstances” (2013. p. 264).

Three other parties resisted until the 1990s: the PCE(m-l), MC, and LCR. Given their illegal status, the first went to the 1979 elections under the name *Izquierda Republicana* (IR; the Republican Left). But both in these elections, and in those in 1982 in which they were finally able to present themselves under their official name, the results were very bad. Their decline then started and ended with their dissolution in 1992. On the other hand, the MC and the LCR underwent similar changes which resulted in them briefly joining forces. After 1979, the MC started a process of profound transformation that led it to renounce its electoral strategy, to abandon Marxism, and distance itself from worker’s issues and the unions and to direct their activism towards new social movements. In this context, its militants agreed with those in the LCR, a party with which [the MC] also shared [political] positions at that time. In 1991, the two parties decided to unify into a new federal organisation, called the *Izquierda Alternativa* (Alternative Left). However, they experienced a huge political crisis in 1994 which resulted in their dissolution. That year the *emecés* and the *troskos*¹⁷ from all the autonomous communities, except for the Basque Country, definitively separated. Even so, these different territorial organisations stayed alive because the LCR’s activists left while those of the MC stayed. Thus, the imprints of the LCR were erased but these parties continued to be active, at the very least preserving the historical memory, thought, and practices that distinguished the old activists of the MC.¹⁸

A BRIEF CONCLUSION

Gonzalo Wilhelmi (2016) states that the citizen mobilisations in factories, universities, neighbourhoods, and streets, prevented the continuation of the Franco regime after [the dictator’s] death. The revolutionary left played a decisive role in this mobilising process. During its heyday, this left comprised a very diverse set of organisations that was responsible for a considerable amount of activism which had a strong social and political impact. But the process of democratic transition did not go well for them at all. In other words, the rise of democracy in Spain developed in parallel with the decline of radical organisations. Cornered by the negotiations and pacts made between the Francoist government and the opposition, they suffered resounding defeats in the referendums and elections held before 1980. In a context of economic crisis and strong institutional predominance over certain mobilisations that were heading towards defensive positions (Martínez, 2013, p. 109), the sum of many factors led to the [revolutionary left’s] generalised collapse. Among these factors were the consolidation of the new regime and parallel rise of ‘validated’ parties, [the left’s] inability to fulfil their aspirations of political rupture, and their failed attempts to adapt their strategy to consolidate the reform. The beginning of the 1980s saw the dissolution of many of these organisations and the general weakening of the few that then remained. In their subsequent evolution, to different degrees, they tended to become sectarian and to reorient their thought and praxis in new directions and to other fusions.

17 Colloquial terms by which the militants of the MC and LCR were known, respectively.

18 This was the case of up to eight territorial entities, although these did not include: the Basque organisation *Zutik; Revolta*, in the Valencian Community; *Acción Alternativa*, in Andalusia and the Canary Islands; *Liberation*, in Madrid, Asturias, and La Rioja; *Inzar*, in Galicia; or *Batzarre*, in Navarre. Only in Catalonia was the rupture so large that it caused the disappearance of the group called *Revolta*.

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