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Democracy and Dictatorship among the Catalan Intelligentsia: the Matteotti Affair and the Reflections of Francesc Cambó

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abstract

The debate over dictatorship and democracy is a fundamental feature of the cultural and political landscape that gave rise to the strategies and approaches of intellectuals between the two world wars. Their conceptions of the two systems weighed heavily in their reflections as liberal democratic ideals lost credibility and fell into decline. It is often said that the revolutions in Russia in 1917 and Italy in 1922 pushed intellectuals to choose between socialism and fascism. The political situation in Catalonia offers suggestive insights into this dilemma. More specifically, the present paper examines the debate sparked among Catalan intellectuals by the kidnapping and assassination of a socialist member of the Italian parliament, Giacomo Matteotti (1885-1924). The Matteotti affair coincided with the publication of a series of articles exploring the connections between democracy and dictatorship. Notable among these pieces are the contributions of the conservative Catalan nationalist leader Francesc Cambó (1876-1947), who wrote for the newspaper *La Veu de Catalunya*. Cambó's articles, reprinted later in the same year in a book on Italian fascism, *Entorn del feixisme italià*, spawned a bitter refutation of his position that reached beyond the historical context.

key words

Fascism, Democracy, Dictatorship, Nationalism, Intellectuals, Catalonia.

The post-war period and the rise of dictatorial systems of government: Primo de Rivera and the Catalan regionalists

One of the most striking features of the years immediately following the First World War was how profoundly the panorama of European states had changed, and the Mediterranean area was no exception. The worldwide impact of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the disappearance of ruling dynasties in Russia, Germany, Austria and the Ottoman Empire had set a new international stage. The very ideas of democracy and the liberal state entered into a pro-

tracted period of crisis. This crisis was visible in the collapse of states forged in the nineteenth century and it ushered in a period in which constitutional freedoms were suspended and dictatorial systems of government took power. On the shores of the Mediterranean, examples included Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece¹. The rapid chain of events in Italy served as a lesson for the entire Mediterranean. Starting in 1919, Italian society experienced an explosion of revolutionary activity known as the “Red Biennium”. The period was characterized not only by workers’ revolts and insurrections but also by mounting violence committed by fascist groups led by Benito Mussolini. The violence of Mussolini’s Blackshirts succeeded in overturning the will of the country’s last liberal government, which decided to hand power to Mussolini in late October 1922, after thousands of fascists had gathered in Rome².

The Catalan nationalist and republican Amadeu Hurtado (1875-1950), right-hand man of Francesc Macià and Niceto Alcalá Zamora, recalls in his memoirs that the leader of the Blackshirts had taken “power to impose his feverish nationalism on the country and firmly establish one of [the] many dictatorships of the period”. Interestingly, Hurtado himself drew an analogy between events in Russia and Italy, noting that the Italian dictatorship “marked the leading edge of the invading spirit of the Eastern hordes”³. In the long debate on the nature of totalitarianism⁴, liberal public opinion underscored the deep-seated analogies between socialist and fascist dictatorships. From early on, Catalan intellectuals linked to the autonomist and nationalist camps stressed the analogy between the differing dictatorships that were to mark the twentieth century⁵.

1 R. Griffin, *International Fascism: Theories, Causes, and the New Consensus*, London: Arnold, 1998; D. Berg-Schlosse, J. Mitchell (eds.), *Conditions of Democracy in Europe, 1919-1939*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000; J. W. Borejsza, *La escalada del odio. Movimientos y sistemas autoritarios y fascistas en Europa, 1919-1945*, Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2002.

2 Cf. F. Fabbri, *Le origini della guerra civile. L’Italia dalla Grande guerra al fascismo (1918-1921)*, Torino: UTET, 2009 and G. Albanese, *La marcia su Roma*, Roma: Laterza, 2006. For more on fascist violence, see also M. Franzinelli, *Squadristi. Protagonisti e tecniche della violenza fascista. 1919-1922*, Milan: Mondadori, 2004.

3 A. Hurtado, *Quaranta anys d’advocat. Història del meu temps 1894-1936*, Barcelona: Ed. 62, p. 400 (1st ed. Mexico: Xaloc, 1956).

4 Cf. the voice of totalitarianism in N. Bobbio, N. Matteucci, G. Pasquino, *Dizionario di Politica*, Turin: UTET, 1983.

5 The initial debate is explored in G. C. Cattini, “Democràcia versus dictadura: els intel·lectuals catalans entre la presa del poder del Mussolini i el cop d’Estat de Primo de Rivera” in S. Serra (coord.), *Les investigacions recents del món contemporani a la Mediterrània*, Palma: University of the Balearic Islands, under publication. On the impact of the First World War and the decade of the 1920s on Catalan intellectuals, see E. Ucelay de Cal, “La crisi de la postguerra” in P.

Similarly, international politics and European national movements came to play a crucial role in the articulation of the strategies and approaches of the political wing of Catalan nationalism⁶.

On 29 October, back on the Italian peninsula, Mussolini took his first steps toward consolidating the so-called “fascist revolution”. He turned the Blackshirts into a regular police corps in the Volunteer Militia for National Security (MVSN) and pushed through electoral reform designed to secure him a solid governing majority. The new Acerbo election law, passed in November 1923, gave the party winning the largest share of the votes – provided that they had secured at least 25 percent of the votes – two-thirds of the seats in parliament. Under this new law, elections were called for April 1924. Amid widespread violence by the Blackshirts, victory went to the nationalist list (an umbrella grouping of the National Fascist Party, liberals and conservatives). The nationalist list gathered more than 61% of the votes, while opposition forces in parliament were almost completely annihilated. In May 1924, the moderate socialist Giacomo Matteotti alleged election fraud against the fascists and called for the results to be declared null and void. Matteotti had collected proof that showed how startling levels of corruption had enabled the fascists to take power. Bankers and industrialists had given huge sums of money to the fascists and, in return, expected to win contracts. The corruption had funded the creation of fascist chapters throughout Italy and rapidly filled the pockets of the movement’s supporters. Moreover, Matteotti had unearthed a two-pronged scandal of colossal proportions that threatened to topple the whole regime: first, the

Gabriel (dir.) *Història de la cultura catalana. Vol. VIII: Primers Avantguardes (1918-1930)*, Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1997, p. 31-80; for a broad overview of the Catalan intelligentsia of the period, see J. Casassas (coord.), *Els intel·lectuals i el poder a Catalunya (1808-1975)*, Barcelona: Pòrtic, 1999. For the debate on the reception of fascism in Spain, see the selection of texts collected by Manuelle Peloille in M. Peloille, *Fascismo en ciernes. España 1922-1930. Textos recuperados*, Toulouse: Presses universitaires de Mirail, 2005.

- 6 X. M. Núñez Seixas, *Internacionalitzant el nacionalisme. El catalanisme polític i la qüestió nacional a Europa (1914-1936)*, Catarroja: Editorial Afers & Publicacions of the University of Valencia, 2010, but also E. Ucelay de Cal, “El Mirall de Catalunya: models internacionals en el desenvolupament del nacionalisme i del separatisme català, 1875-1923”, in *Estudios de Historia Social*, no. 28-29 (1984), p. 213-219; “Moderni sogni girondini. Italiani, portoghesi e catalani nella rivoluzione repubblicana spagnola (1923-1938)” in *Quaderni del Circolo Carlo Rosselli*, no. 2 (1996), p. 67-86; “Entre el ejemplo italiano y el irlandés: la escisión generalizada de los nacionalismos hispanos 1919-1922” in *Ayer*, no. 63 (2006), p. 75-118. Also, J. Burgaya, *La formulació del catalanisme conservador i els models “nacionals” coetanis. Premsa catalanista i moviments nacionalistes contemporanis*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Autonomous University of Barcelona, 1999 and G. C. Cattini, “L’edat de la violència i els nous nacionalismes: els intel·lectuals catalans i l’ocupació de la ciutat de Fiume (1919-1920)” in the publication of the proceedings of the First Pere Anguera International Congress, Reus-Tarragona, Rovira Virgili University, under publication.

state was trafficking in leftover war materials (from weapons to food and clothing), selling them at cut prices to merchants and businesspeople friendly to the regime; second, Mussolini intended to hand over monopoly control of the Italian petroleum market to the US giant Sinclair Oil. To avert public exposure of these scandals, a group of fascists kidnapped Matteotti in Rome on 10 June 1924. Mystery shrouded Matteotti's disappearance until 16 August, when his remains were found in a ditch outside the Italian capital. In response, the opposition stormed out of Parliament, expecting the king to take action by calling for the resignation of the leader of the Blackshirts⁷.

These events attracted widespread comment in the Spanish press, despite the censorship imposed by the military council of Primo de Rivera. At that time, dictatorship in Germany was still in its early stages. A conjunction of factors was to pave its way⁸, principally the structural crisis of the post-war German state and the almost chronic presence of the military in public life. In addition, liberal regimes across Europe had fallen into disrepute and there was growing interest in what was called "Pretorianism", which drew on anti-parliamentary theories in wide circulation since the end of the nineteenth century. For example, in stark contrast to the Spanish military uprisings of the eighteenth century, Primo de Rivera brought the military to power with the express aim of instilling the values and attitudes of the army in all citizens.

Another weighty reason for the coup can be traced to the economic and social crisis of the post-war period. Sweeping layoffs in the textile and steel industries soon led to armed conflict between the gunmen of the Free Trade Union and the anarchists. The death toll reached into the hundreds⁹.

The Rif War in Morocco provided yet another cause. Army officials were critical of the parliament's handling of the Disaster of Annual, a major military defeat for Spain. They deplored the defeatism and pacifism of liberal

7 Cf. M. Canali, *Il delitto Matteotti*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004.

8 E. González Calleja, *La España de Primo de Rivera. La modernización autoritaria 1923-1930*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2005; DDAA, *La Europa de las dictaduras: de Mussolini a Primo de Rivera y Salazar*, Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1997; S. Ben Ami, *La dictadura de Primo de Rivera, 1923-1930*, Barcelona: Planeta, 1984; J. Casassas, *La dictadura de Primo de Rivera (1923-1930)*, Barcelona: Editorial Anthropos, 1983.

9 Cf. A. Balcells, *Violència social i poder polític. Sis estudis sobre la Catalunya contemporània*, Barcelona: Pòrtic, 2001; id., *El pistolisme*, Barcelona: Pòrtic, 2009; S. Bengoechea, *Organització patronal i conflictivitat social a Catalunya. Tradició i corporativisme entre finals de segle i la dictadura de Primo de Rivera*, Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 1994; M. A. Pradas Baena, *L'Anarquisme i les lluites socials a Barcelona 1918-1923. La repressió obrera i la violència*, Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 2003.

politicians. The high command abhorred the decision of the liberal political class not to prosecute the war and finish off Abd el-Krim and his troops, particularly after the defeat at Annual in 1921, but instead to focus their priorities on downsizing and modernizing the army.

Lastly, nationalist momentum in Catalonia acted as a further crucial factor in the coup, particularly when it became evident that radicalized nationalist sectors had, on the one hand, gained ground in the Catalan working class and, on the other hand, joined with Basques and Galicians in the Triple Alliance of 1923.

Right from the start, the Italian dictatorship became a model for imitation and emulation by conservative movements throughout Europe. Primo de Rivera himself sought to imitate the Italian example. This new development features in most of the memoirs written by intellectuals of the time. For instance, the republican journalist Claudi Ametlla (1883-1968), wrote that fascist theories had poisoned the minds of men close to the Spanish dictator who then used these ideas to justify their grab for power¹⁰. Hurtado, mentioned earlier, compared the Spanish dictatorship to a historical turning point, reached jointly with countries such as Russia, Italy, Greece, Portugal, Hungary and Turkey.¹¹ The liberal regionalist Joan Garriga i Massó (1871-1956) insisted that social issues could not be resolved by “alternating weak, indecisive and ill-prepared governments” and fuelled speculation that King Alfonso XIII was “on the lookout for his Mussolini”. In the end, it was General Primo de Rivera who toppled the government. A portion of Catalan society greeted him eagerly, because it was thought that his repeated “regionalist” statements prior to the coup would result in accords with the Regionalist League (the *Lliga Regionalista*)¹². Jaume Bofill i Mates (1878-1933), an intellectual and writer in the Noucentisme movement, wrote that a large section of Catalan society viewed the overthrow “with

10 Claudi Ametlla said of Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship: “The first part of the reign of the Dictatorship was particularly military in character; the second gave roles to civilians poisoned by the fascist theories that Mussolini had enthroned in Italy in 1922. They tried hard to imitate the precedent set by the neighbouring peninsula. Without [this precedent], it is highly likely that we would never have known the anti-democratic regime, or it would have been nothing but a flash in the pan. It is common for military governments to want to justify themselves a posteriori with doctrines that, in this case, the Italian example produced in abundance” in C. Ametlla, *Memòries polítiques*. Vol. II, Barcelona: Distribucions Catalònia, 1979, p. 57.

11 A. Hurtado, *Quaranta anys d’advocat...*, cit., p. 414.

12 J. Garriga i Massó, *Memòries d’un liberal catalanista (1871-1939)*, Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1987, p. 258 and ss. Cf. the contemporary debate on democracy versus dictatorship among Catalan intellectuals in C. Cattini, G. C. Cattini, “Democràcia versus dictadura: els intel·lectuals catalans entre la presa del poder del Mussolini i el cop d’Estat de Primo de Rivera”, *op cit.*

a certain sense of relief”); it was believed that the military would put an end to social unrest in Catalonia, clean up Spanish politics and favour the demands of Catalan autonomists against the radical proposals of minority separatist sectors¹³.

Puig Cadafalch, the architect and former president of the Mancomunitat of Catalonia, acknowledged this view when, in February 1930, he recalled that the coup had been well-received by Catalan regionalists and the Catalan bourgeoisie because everybody expected swift military action to return social peace to Catalonia and put a stop to the charade of democracy at the national level in Spain¹⁴. Similarly, Francesc Cambó, the charismatic leader of the Regionalist League since 1917 and twice a minister in Spanish governments (1917-1921)¹⁵, also admitted in his memoirs that Primo de Rivera, when he was Capitan-General of Catalonia, had laid the ground for his coup by garnering support in various Catalan cities and villages and cultivating good relationships with the top officials in the regionalist movement. Nonetheless, Cambó emphasized his complete non-participation in the events. He had recently retired from politics, in June 1923, and was sailing in Asia Minor at the time in question. In fact, when he read of the coup in the papers, he fired off telegrams to leading members of the Regionalist League instructing them to refrain from any participation or commitment to the dictatorial adventure¹⁶.

13 J. Bofill, *Valoració inicial de la dictadura* (manuscript of January 1924) cited by J. Casassas, *Jaume Bofill i Mates (1878-1933)*, Barcelona: Curial, 1980, p. 296-298.

14 Cf. J. Puig Cadafalch, “La Mancomunitat de Catalunya i el Dictador” in *La Veu de Catalunya*, 27 and 28 /II/1930 cit. by C.E. Ehrlich, *Lliga Regionalista: Lliga Catalana, 1901-1936*, Barcelona: Institut Cambó - Editorial Alpha, 2004, p. 358. There were also writers in the period, like Artur Peruchó, who recalled meetings held prior to the coup in which the regionalists had negotiated their backing of Primo de Rivera’s takeover in exchange for recognition of Catalan autonomy and the establishment of economic protectionism (cf. A. Peruchó, *Catalunya sota la Dictadura*, Barcelona: Proa, 1930, p. 16-21, cit. by J. Casassas, *La dictadura de Primo de Rivera (1923-1930)*. *Textos*, Barcelona: Anthropos, 1983, p. 77-80).

15 The leading biography of Cambó remains the book by J. M. Pabón, *Cambó*, 3 vols., Barcelona: Editorial Alpha, 1952-1969 (reprinted in one volume in 1999). For Cambó’s thought, cf. J. Casassas, “Introducció als grans temes cambonians” in M. Roca Junyent (ed), *El món de Cambó*, Barcelona: Editorial Alpha, 2001, p. 13- 35 and idem, “Francesc Cambó Batlle i la seva aportació al catalanisme regeneracionista” in F. Cambó, *El catalanisme regeneracionista* (ed. J. Casassas), Barcelona: Edicions de la Magrana - Diputació de Barcelona, 1990, p.V-XXXVI; A. Almendros, *Francesc Cambó: la forja d’un policy maker*, Barcelona: Publications of the Abadia de Montserrat, 2000 and B. Riquer, *Francesc Cambó: entre la Monarquia i la República*, Barcelona: Editorial Base, 2007.

16 F. Cambó, *Memòries (1876-1936)*, Barcelona: Institut Alpha, 1981 p. 375-376. For information on the period, cf. J. M. Roig i Rosich, *La dictadura de Primo de Rivera a Catalunya: un assaig de repressió cultural*, Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 1992.

Political forces opposed to conservative regionalism levelled accusations against the sector for providing cover to Primo de Rivera's project. The warm reception given to the general by leading figures in the Regionalist League at the furniture trade fair *l'Exposició del Moble* on 14 September 1923 supported this speculation. In one of its ultimate issues before closure by the authorities, the anarchist newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera* attacked Cambó as a "wandering Jew", out of the scene in Catalonia but certain to return as a minister as soon as the dictator appointed him. The republican newspaper *El Imparcial* lambasted the regionalists for applauding Primo de Rivera¹⁷.

The Matteotti affair: international scandal and Cambó's reflections

Contemporary observers could not fail to take note of the remarks made by Cambó in his renowned lecture at the Teatro del Centro in Madrid. To emerge from social, economic and political crisis, Cambó claimed, what was needed was an imposition of authority. In his view, "governments with the most solid structures at present are defined by one man and revolve around one man"¹⁸.

According to Garriga i Massó, Cambó had repeated his call for a dictatorial government of six months to carry out the legal changes needed in Spain. Primo de Rivera himself had spoken in his manifesto of "a promissory note due in three months"¹⁹.

Abolishing the prerogatives of the Mancomunitat and enacting harmful legislation attacking the Catalan language and symbols contributed to a new coolness and growing hostility among conservative regionalists toward Primo de Rivera.

Less than a year after the coup, news coming out of Italy took on special significance with the disappearance of the socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti. The severity of the crime blemished Mussolini's regime with an indelible stain.

17 Cf. "Alrededor del golpe de Estado" in *Solidaridad Obrera*, 21/IX/1923, p. 1. For the history of this newspaper, see S. Tàvera, *Solidaridad Obrera. El fer-se i desfer-se d'un diari anarcosindicalista (1915-1939)*, Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona / Col·legi de periodistes de Catalunya, 1992 and for the period, see E. González Calleja, *La España de Primo de Rivera...* cit. and idem, *El máuser y el sufragio. Orden público, subversión y violencia en la crisis de la Restauración*, Madrid: CSIC, 1999.

18 F. Cambó, "L'actualitat social i política", lecture given by Francesc Cambó in the Teatro del Centro in Madrid on 10 April 1920, reproduced in F. Cambó, *El catalanisme regeneracionista*, cit., p. 231-244, with the citation on p. 239.

19 J. Garriga i Massó, *Memòries d'un liberal catalanista (1871-1939)*, cit., p. 261.

The negative light cast on his dictatorship could, *mutatis mutandis*, implicate any type of authoritarian regime, particularly the Spanish regime. Primo de Rivera himself had never hidden his sympathy for the leader of the Blackshirts²⁰. Columns appearing in the press most closely allied to the ideals of Catalan nationalism voiced unanimous condemnation. On 17 or 18 June, the regionalist newspaper *La Veu de Catalunya* gave over almost its entire foreign affairs section to the disappearance of the Italian socialist deputy. An anonymous editorial, which was undoubtedly penned by Joaquim Pellicena (1881-1938), the editor of *La Veu de Catalunya*, denounced the fascists' constant resort to violence. He argued that, as in the case of the Irish nationalists, it threatened to plunge the country into a spiral of bloodshed that would be hard to stop²¹.

From the pages of the republican newspaper *El Diluvio*, commentators focused on the need for all the press, fascist and non-fascist alike, to demand that moral law be re-established and justice done²². For his part, the longtime republican Eusebi Corominas disparaged all brands of political radicalism and their "demagogic nonsense" and contrasted them with democracy, a regime characterized by freedom and respect toward its citizens. Corominas wrote: "a Government without the taint of absolutism is the supreme ideal of our politics"²³.

Some days later, an editorial in the same newspaper stressed that the better part of Italian public opinion was firm in calling for a return of parliamentary sovereignty to Italy²⁴.

20 With regard to Primo de Rivera's sympathy toward Mussolini, I turn to G. C. Cattini, *El gran complot. Qui va trair Macià? La trama italiana*, Badalona: Ara Llibres, 2009, p. 181-203; also Cf. J. Tüssel, I. Saz, "Mussolini y Primo de Rivera. Las relaciones políticas y diplomáticas de dos dictaduras mediterráneas", in *Italia y la guerra civil española*, Madrid: Centro de Estudios históricos, 1986, p. 171-245; S. Sueiro Seoane, "La política mediterránea de Primo de Rivera. El triángulo hispano-italo-francés", in *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, no. 1, 1987, p. 183-223; idem, "El complot catalanista de Prats de Molló. Una intriga internacional oculta tras un suceso interno", in *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, no. 5, 1992, p. 385-396; idem, *España en el Mediterráneo. Primo de Rivera y la "cuestión marroquí", 1923-1930*, Madrid: UNED, 1993; G. Palomares, *Mussolini y Primo de Rivera. Política exterior de dos dictadores*, Madrid: Eudema, 1989.

21 S.A., "El conreu de la violència" in LVC, 18/VI/1924, p. 5.

22 "Un Gesto", *El Diluvio*, 18/VI/1924, p. 8.

23 E. Corominas Cornell, "Los radicalismos políticos", *El Diluvio*, 22/VI/1924, p. 22. He continued to affirm that "the free citizen, with the ability to speak and write, to assemble with other citizens in order to discuss and set the basic rules of government, is, in my opinion, absolutely necessary for the highest function of a democratic regime, which involves the rule of law according to criteria that may be broader or more restrictive, but that never undermines rights, against which any disrespectful aim is criminal and worthy of punishment".

On 27 June, the republican newspaper printed a visibly censored editorial conjecturing that Primo de Rivera had drawn inspiration from Mussolini's government when he organized his military council. The newspaper's view was that the Italian dictatorship had been wounded by the Matteotti affair and blasted the rhetoric used by the head of the fascist regime²⁵.

A special denunciation of fascism and a blunt condemnation of the Matteotti affair appeared in the pages of the *La Publicitat*, the mouthpiece of *Acció Catalana*. In one of the pieces, Josep Pla unhesitatingly compared fascism to a cancer on European society and he roundly condemned Mussolini and his Blackshirts for the assassination of the "poor Giacomo Matteotti"²⁶. Pla accused the Italian bourgeoisie of using the fascists to suppress the social demands of the workers' movement²⁷. He also publicized notes from the Italian press detailing the arrests of numerous fascists throughout Italy. Pla's articles attracted heavy cuts from the censors of Primo de Rivera's military council²⁸.

From the pages of the newspaper of *Acció Catalana*, two contributions by J.V. Foix are especially noteworthy. On 1 July²⁹, Foix's first piece featured an editor's note reminding readers of contributors' freedom of expression. In the article, Foix responded to articles written by Josep Pla, with whom Foix had sparred in 1920 from his column in the journal *Monitor*³⁰. Now Foix harked back to the spirit of that earlier controversy, underscoring "that we need to search Italian fascism for more than bourgeois reaction". Foix singled out elements that he, as a Catalan nationalist, considered worthy of admiration: na-

25 S.A., "Fuegos artificiales", in *El Diluvio*, 27/VI/1924, p. 11.

26 J. P. [Josep Pla], "Els crims polítics. Giacomo Matteotti", in *La Publicitat*, 19/VI/1924, p. 1. For more on Pla and his output in those years, see M. Gustà, "El Fascio de la primera hora vist per Josep Pla" in *L'Avenç*, no. 186 (1994), p. 10-15 and in more detail in idem, *Els Orígens ideològics i literaris de Josep Pla*, Barcelona: Curial, 1995.

27 Josep Pla, "Després de l'assassinat de Matteotti. La davalla del feixisme", in *La Publicitat*, 20,VI/1924, p. 1.

28 Josep Pla, "Després de l'assassinat de Matteotti. La banda del Viminal", "Després de l'assassinat de Matteotti. La clau del Feixisme", "Després de l'assassinat de Matteotti. El Caporetto del Feixisme", "D'Itàlia. L'anvers del miracle feixista", "Itàlia. Farinacci", "Persistència de la crisi del feixisme", in *La Publicitat*, 22, 25, 26/VI, 5 and 30/VII and 13/VIII/1924, p. 1.

29 J. V. Foix, "Aspectes del feixisme. L'expressió d'una voluntat nacional" in *La Publicitat*, 1/VII/1924, p. 1.

30 See note 5 and also: M. Guerrero, *J. V. Foix investigador en poesia*, Barcelona, Empúries, 1996 and P. Gómez Inglada, *Quinze anys de periodisme: les col·laboracions de J. V. Foix in La Publicitat (1922-1936)*, Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2010. Also E. Ucelay de Cal, *El imperialismo catalán. Prat de la Riba, Cambó y la conquista moral de España*, Barcelona: Edhasa, 2003.

tionalist revolution, heroism, youth, the renovation of the old politics, the spirit of self-sacrifice and, above all, the collective manifestation of a national spirit.

Ten days later, in response to accusations of philo-fascism³¹, Foix wrote again on Mussolini's regime, justifying his passion and his hopes in the Italian movement by holding it up to comparison with another movement that had fixed his attention and the attention of the whole world: the Soviet revolution. In Foix's view, the two events both drew on Engel's vision of revolution as "the most authoritarian of things: because it is an act whereby one part of the population imposes its will on another part through guns, bayonets and cannons". Foix stressed that the real difference must be sought between defenders of democracy and proponents of dictatorship, regardless of whether it is the dictatorship of a class or of a nation. "Anyone who takes an interest in how the social and political struggles in Europe unfold," Foix wrote, "must, from an intellectual point of view, put himself in one of two camps, the camp for Democracy or the camp for Dictatorship". To conclude, he wrote that it was necessary to weep both for Matteotti assassinated in Italy and for all the Matteottis murdered in Russia or deported to Siberia³².

In that same month of July 1924, the complexity of the debate on democracy and dictatorship occupied various editorials of the mouthpiece of *Acció Catalana*. The pieces took inspiration from reflections on the impact of the violence of the First World War in European countries and on the decency of democratic systems in contrast with the new dictatorships³³. Where the censors permitted, news reports addressed actions taken by the Primo de Rivera regime, including the removal of locally elected officials who were replaced by individuals directly appointed by the military council³⁴.

31 J.V. Foix, "Motivacions italianes del feixisme" in *La Publicitat*, 11/07/1924, p. 1.

32 The author wrote that the champions of Democracy need to "fight tenaciously against fascist Rome and Bolshevik Moscow, the dictatorship of the nation state and the dictatorship of class [...] and voice the same indignation at the Italian secret police as at the Russian secret police. They [the champions of Democracy] must weep not only for Matteotti, assassinated so despicably in Italy, but also the Matteottis, socialists too, assassinated in Russia or deported to Siberia. It is not laudable to battle fascism with democratic catapults in the service of the army of communist social revolution [...]."

33 "El perill dels violents", "Austeritat democràtica", "La Guerra i el futur", "La malaltia de la violència" in *La Publicitat*, 19/VI, 9 /VII, 5/VIII and 14/IX/1924.

34 Cf. the editorial "Les crisis municipals" in *La Publicitat*, 24/VII/1924, which states: "Just as backlash from the two anti-democratic experiences of Russia and Italy will have given a new prestige to the democratic idea in the broadest international, social and political sphere, so will the fleeting experience of Spanish—and also Italian—municipalities lead to an analogous conclusion in the most limited sphere of public life. Even if democracy had no positive

Democracy, liberalism and dictatorship also stood at the centre of a series of nineteen articles on fascism written by Francesc Cambó in *La Veu de Catalunya* between 16 July and 15 October 1924. A few years later these articles were collected into a book that was translated into several languages³⁵.

Cambó took up the topic of fascism impelled by a comparison between Italy as he had known it in 1922, amid the Red Biennium, and Italy conditioned to fascist violence in 1924. From his first article, the conservative regionalist reflected on the impact of the First World War and how it had given birth to two movements, the Bolsheviks and the fascists, united by their “faithfully anti-democratic” natures and by their denial of popular sovereignty. They seized government “for the minority who, because of its audacity, its strength, its heroism, has won the right to govern over others” (16/IX). In another article, Cambó unwaveringly compared Lenin with Mussolini, although he also saw their sharp distinctions. He saw one, the socialist leader, as the paradigm of an ideologue, while the other was the personification of the man of action. He wrote: “Between Lenin and Mussolini, there is the chasm that separates the Slavic world from the Latin world; the East from the West; the solitary visionary who is consumed by his inner flames, from the Latin steeped in the air and the sun of the Mediterranean” (24/IX). The use of violence was typical of the Bolshevik and fascist regimes, but also typical of the Irish cause, and aspects of all these cases suggested the contradictory limits of government imposed by force (27/IX).

The Italian case also gave Cambó an opportunity to remark on the disrepute of parliament as an institution and he made clear allusions to Spanish

virtues, it would have in its favour the fact that all other systems capable of replacing it are frankly worse”.

35 F. Cambó, “El feixisme italià. I. Feixisme i bolxevisme”, “II. La Itàlia de 1920”, “III. La Itàlia de 1924”, “IV. El desprestigi del Parlament”, “V. Causes i remeis del desprestigi parlamentari”, “VI. La decepció de la victòria”, “VII. Els orígens immediats del feixisme”, “VIII. En Mussolini i el seu feixisme”, “IX. L’evolució doctrinal d’En Mussolini”, “X. Justificant l’evolució d’En Mussolini”, “XI. Característiques essencials de Mussolini”, “XII. La força i la feblesa de la ideologia feixista”, “XIII. Paral·lel entre Lenin i Mussolini”, “XIV. Els fruits de la violència”, “XV. Les conseqüències de l’assassinat de Matteotti”, “XVI. El present i l’esdevenidor de la revolució feixista”, “XVII. La democràcia i l’autoritat: els moderns Parlaments”, “XVIII. Com s’és transformada la missió de l’Estat” and “Com nou òrgans han de venir a complir noves funcions” in *La Veu de Catalunya*, 15, 23 and 30/VII, 6, 13, 20 and 27/VIII, 3, 10, 13, 17, 20, 24 and 27/IX, 1, 4, 8, 11 and 15/X/1924. The title of the book is: *Entorn el feixisme italià*, Barcelona: Editorial Catalana, 1924 (ed. in Spanish: 1925; ed. in Italian 1925; ed. in French: 1925). I have drawn on the history of the Italian translation of this work and of *La Nacionalitat catalana* by Prat de la Riba, in G.C. Cattini, “Joan Estelrich i l’Expansió Catalana. La traducció de Prat de la Riba i Cambó en la Itàlia feixista” in *Cercles. Revista d’Història Cultural* no. 12 (2009), p. 75–89 (available at: <http://www.raco.cat/index.php/Cercles/article/view/196513/298971>).

reality as it was before the coup of Primo de Rivera. The low standing of representative institutions was not peculiar to Italy. It was shared by a large number of European countries, particularly the Latin countries of the Mediterranean area. Moreover, it had existed prior to the First World War, although the conflict had served to foreground the contradictions in the political system. The regionalist leader noted that democratization and expanding the vote had not realized the ideal of the parliamentary democratic conception of the nineteenth century, which had promoted belief in “the substantive potential of abstract formulas” at the expense of “real values”, but had instead produced a reality of democratic farces, of cronyism and fraud (6/VIII). In Cambó’s view, this had been made possible because of Spain’s lack of civic culture. He thought that only countries where the people had a deeply ingrained sense of citizenship, such as Britain, could produce the conditions needed for genuine parliamentary democracy. He put this in stark contrast with the pantomime that had occurred in the Mediterranean area (13/VIII). Cambó viewed the coup as “appropriate and desirable” if it put a stop to “a system, a regime that was fruitless and abject, doomed to drive the country to ruin, debility and the liquidation of all the vital means and energies of a nation” (20/IX).

In other articles, Cambó analyzed the peculiar conditions that accounted for the triumph of fascism in Italy. He drew on political and economic history, but he also made appeals to pseudo-scientific theories on the southern nature of the Latin peoples, who were supposedly irrational and prone to support violent responses and insurrections and where the theorists of socialism had never been truly understood by the masses, who idolized their revolutionary leaders. Significantly, this theory is a focus of Cambó’s reflections in an article published only two weeks after the remains of Giacomo Matteotti were found (27/VIII).

The regionalist leader comments on the evolution of Mussolini and his ideas, noting how their adaptability to circumstances had enabled the republican fascism of 1919 to evolve into monarchical fascism by 1922. What had made the change possible was the pragmatic character of fascism, which subordinated everything to Italian imperialism, expansion and grandeur. In this context, Cambó was critical of Mussolini for allowing himself to be intimidated by the opposition after the Matteotti affair. Mussolini’s reaction had been to order the arrest of men at his side from the beginning. He had also replaced Emilio de Bono, Minister of the Interior, with Luigi Federzoni, an intellectual from the Italian nationalist camp who had not been an early proponent of the fascist cause. These actions, according to Cambó, showed great weakness on Mussolini’s part and signalled his coming end (1/X).

In his final articles, Cambó took stock of the “present and future of the fascist revolution” and once again compared the Bolshevik and fascist revolu-

tions. From the former, he thought that the world had learnt “the absolute failure of the communists’ total solution”, while the latter appeared to have left Italy “an irrefutably positive value”. Nevertheless, he expressed his regret that Mussolini had backtracked when it was time to push the “fascist revolution” to its ultimate consequences, which he called “the transformation of the State through the abolition or substantial alteration of the parliamentary regime”. In his view, this experience would have become the keystone of the system and a contribution to all Latin peoples³⁶.

Cambó also reiterated his support for democracy in his final articles, despite his view that mass action by the people had had a damaging effect in the Latin countries. Similarly, he denounced the impact of the growing interdependence of states with world politics and the global economy. Life in every country was being altered in ways that had been unthinkable in the past. Finally, Cambó argued for the need to create presidential regimes, as the United States had, in order to limit the disrepute of parliamentarianism and the dangers of falling into dictatorships. In the US, all the functions of executive power resided in the president, while the parliament was limited to legislative tasks.

Cambó’s predictions about Italy and the future of fascism were entirely at odds with the reality of what came next. Mussolini did not bow to parliamentary opposition. On 3 January 1925, he imposed fascism throughout Italian society. He banned members of the opposition from parliament and he prosecuted and prohibited associations, parties and trade unions that were hostile to fascism.

Within the framework of the law and under the eyes of the censors, publications linked to the cultural and political wings of Catalan nationalism followed the process with telling concern. The newspaper *La Publicitat* reaffirmed and defended the superiority of liberal democracy over dictatorial options then gaining increasing favour among intellectuals³⁷. The articles, chiefly

36 Or in Cambó’s words: “[If Mussolini had abolished Parliament] – if, contrary to what I believe possible, he would yet do it! – Mussolini and fascism would have done an invaluable service to the Latin peoples of Europe and principally to the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula. Whether the attempt failed or succeeded, whether an ideal formula was found or only the ineffectiveness of a formula proven, the value of the lesson would be considerable. And, in this matter, speaking of the new political institutions to be given to the people, it is better, if possible, that the attempt occur elsewhere than at home, because all too often such lessons come at a high price and the glory of receiving them is not always worth the sorrow and the hardship of the giving.” (4/X/ 1924)

37 Cf the editorials: “La pitjor malura”, “L’objectivitat de la democràcia”, “Jocs de mans allà a Moscou”, “De Roma a Londres”, “El criteri qualitatiu en el sufragi”, “Cal partir del sufragi universal”, “Els específics miraculosos”, “La tradició en la política”, “Els vots i els llocs”,

written by Antoni Rovira Virgili, were later collected into a book³⁸ that served as a genuine defence of democracy and liberalism. Rovira's articles were imbued with the ideas of Benedetto Croce, whom Rovira himself had helped to introduce to Catalan readers, writing not only in *La Publicitat* but also in the new *Revista de Catalunya*³⁹. In the latter journal, Rovira also devoted a long article to the thought of Francesc Cambó, calling Cambó a "great engineer" and a competent administrator capable of "conquering material, mechanical and technical difficulties". However, he was critical of Cambó as well, pointing out that he lacked two qualities essential for a good politician: "a fixed sense of direction" and "the ability to know men and perceive human realities". In other words, Rovira accused Cambó of failing to link his politics to programmes but, instead, of acting in accordance to a *realpolitik* pragmatism that bowed to "subjectivism" rather than to any nuanced appreciation of reality⁴⁰.

Much sharper criticism of Cambó appeared in the federal republican organ *El Diluvio*⁴¹. Of particular note is an article by Àngel Samblancat, who penned the harshest indictment of the regionalist politician. In Samblancat's words, the author of *Entorn del feixisme italià* "once again demonstrated in this work his brutal positivism, his incomparable cynicism and his absolute disdain for intelligence and virtue". He went on to charge Cambó with excessive indulgence toward the Italian dictator, arguing that "both men burnt with the same thirst for authority, hierarchy and discipline. Both feel the same appetite for Power, for Government, more or less absolute"⁴².

"L'organització política", "Els principis lliberals", "El gran invent d'Itàlia", "Aquella República", "Les novetats prehistòriques", "Pessimisme i optimisme" in *La Publicitat*, 5, 8, 9, 11 /X/1924; 14, 18, 22 /XI/1924; 6, 10, 12, 29 and 30/XII/1924; 3, 4, 7 /I/1925. Also for articles by J. Pla, "La política exterior del feixisme", "La situació política a Itàlia", "La fase final del feixisme", "Els factors del Feixisme", "Mussolini venedor de fums" in idem, 19, 24, 27, 30/XII/1924; 2/I/1925.

38 A. Rovira Virgili, *Defensa de la democràcia*, Barcelona: Fundació Valentí Almirall, 1930 (now: Pòrtic 2010).

39 Cf. A. R. V. "Professors, filòsofs i poetes", "Benedetto Croce i el lliberalisme" in *La Revista de Catalunya* no. 7 (1925), p. 105-106; no. 10 (1925), p. 406-407.

40 A. Rovira Virgili, "Notes per a l'estudi dels polítics catalans. Francesc Cambó com a polític" in *La Revista de Catalunya*, no. 7 (1925), p. 221-230. This paper was collected by Rovira Virgili in his book on Catalan politicians: *Els polítics catalans: Enric Prat de la Riba, Ildefons Sunyol, Jaume Carner, Joaquim Lluhi i Ressech, Francesc Cambó*, Barcelona: Tipografia Occitània, 1929 (an edition from 1978 contains a foreword by Josep Benet).

41 Cf. Vir, "La ideas del doctor Cambó", or M. Serra, "Pi y Margall y N. Estévez", in *El Diluvio*, 14/IX/1924, p. 17 and 4/X/1924, p. 15.

42 A. Samblancat, "Un parto de Cambó", in *El Diluvio*, 10/I/1925, p. 12.

The newspaper *El Diluvio* tirelessly criticized the deterioration of Italian politics, stating repeatedly that the direction of modern history was toward greater democracy in society⁴³. In this context, Samblancat's article on Cambó articulated a contempt and an animosity that Catalan republicans did not try to hide. The roots of their animosity stretched back to Cambó's alleged betrayal of the revolutionary aims of the summer of 1917, when an assembly of parliamentarians, convening in Barcelona, toyed with the idea of a workers' strike in August, only to backtrack and throw their support to the government of national unity after the intervention of two members of parliament from the Regionalist League (Felip Rodés and Joan Ventosa). That was the prelude to a flurry of ministerial activity that was to bring Cambó into the government of national salvation led by Antoni Maura: first, in 1918, as minister of public works and transport, and then, in 1921, as finance minister.

At the outset of Spain's Second Republic, Samblancat again levelled accusations at Cambó and Cambó's men for their "nauseating materialism and Phoenicianism"⁴⁴. Added to these, the accusations of intellectuals from the socialist and communist left, Catalan and Spanish alike, pegged the leader of the Regionalist League as the chief apologist for the coup perpetrated by Primo de Rivera. Even though Cambó published the book *Les dictadures* in 1929, which spoke of his preference for democratic systems and noted the difficulty of emerging from a dictatorship⁴⁵, the radicalization of the intellectual debate fixed him as one of the men of the dictatorship, a moniker given to him by Joaquim Maurín (1896–1973) in his highly influential book of the time. Maurín, a communist intellectual, held the view that the Catalan regionalist had published *Entorn del feixisme italià* as a "guide to being a dictator", while *Les dictadures* was

43 Cf. F. Urrecha, "Breviario laico. Cabo suelto"; n.a., "Filofascismo"; E. Corominas Cornell, "Por la paz de Europa. El fascismo en decadencia"; n.a., "La revolución se ha hecho conservadora"; E. Corominas Cornell, "En Ginebra: desde Italia: el mundo asiático"; M. Domingo, "Orientaciones. Del régimen monárquico al p régimen parlamentario"; idem, "La autoridad democrática no se desea"; idem, "La violencia contraproducente"; n.a., "Las naciones parlamentarias"; M. Domingo, "Mussolini i Mac Donald"; A. Guerra, "El sufragio universal"; E. Corominas Cornell, "Aspectos de la política internacional: la dictadura en Italia"; n.a., "El silencio italiano", n.a. "El fascismo a la baja" in *El Diluvio*, 7/IX/ 1924, p. 13; 11/IX/1924, p. 7; 14/XI/1924, p. 19; 18/IX/1924, p. 8; 21/X/1921, p. 20; 26/IX/1924, p. 19; 1/X/1924, p. 11; 8/X/1924, p. 15; 22/X/1924, p. 8; 1/XI/ 1924, p. 26; 4/XI/ 1924, p. 23; 16/XI/1924, p. 23; 22/XI/1924, p. 9; 29/XI/1924, p. 9.

44 A. Samblancat, *El caudillo de la Estrella (Maciá)*, Barcelona: El Pasquín del pueblo, n.d., p. 7.

45 F. Cambó, *Les dictadures dels nostres dies*, Barcelona: Editorial Catalònia, 1929. For a summary overview of the date, see P. Gabriel, "Reflexions polítiques davant la crisi dels Estats liberals" in P. Gabriel (dir.) *Història de la cultura catalana. Vol. VIII*. cit. p. 81-102.

“the guide for the perfect dictator who wants to stop being one”⁴⁶. Andreu Nin (1892-1937) was no less caustic, devoting his entire study *Les dictadures dels nostres dies*⁴⁷ to a Marxist response to the content of Cambó’s book.

These contributions are a far cry from the discussions of dictatorship and democracy that heralded the first difficult post-war years in Europe, when many of the liberal states on the continent were collapsing in the face of dictatorial regimes set to hold power through the coming decades. The 1930s ushered in a period of increasingly embittered confrontation. Gradually, a part of the Catalan intelligentsia moved along a path of growing radicalization, enthralled by totalitarian regimes that seemed to personify the onset of a new stage in history.

Translation from Catalan by Joe Graham

46 J. Maurín, *Los Hombres de la dictadura*, Barcelona: Anagrama, 1975, p. 94-95 and 112-113 (1st ed. Madrid, Cénit, 1930).

47 A. Nin, *Les dictadures dels postres dies*, Barcelona: Llibreria Catalònia, 1930.