

Socialists and communists and the Catalan national question: From 1888 until recent times

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ABSTRACT

During the first third of the twentieth century, the socialists did not have a positive stance towards the Catalan demand for autonomy, and the dependence on the socialist leadership in Madrid hindered their expansion in Catalonia, where anarcho-syndicalism predominated until 1936. After the unification of socialists and communists in Catalonia at the beginning of the Civil War, the unified party and its trade union became a central force until the republican defeat in 1939. After the Franco regime, socialism became an important force in Catalonia until it started to govern the Generalitat in 2003 and contributed to the re-Catalanisation of the country.

KEYWORDS: Socialists, communists, Marxism, Catalan national question

Catalan particularism in the guise of patriotism that defends against the Spanish state's de-Catalanising actions has had clearly anti-centralist manifestations since the 1840s. Between 1848 and 1873, it was interpreted as republican federalism. The definition of Catalonia as a nation or nationality had spread before the end of the century, and this was prior to Spain's colonial defeat in 1898 with the loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines and before the 1901 electoral victory in Barcelona of the first Catalanist political party: the Lliga Regionalista de Catalunya (Regionalist League of Catalonia).

Other events worth recalling alongside the first 1 May celebration in 1890, which demanded the eight-hour workday, is the lockout that same year declared by the textile industrialists of the Llobregat River against the reformist *Les Tres Classes de Vapor*, the peasant uprisings by the *rabassaires* over the social consequences of the vineyards' destruction by the phylloxera plague and the anarchist bombs in Barcelona from 1893 to 1896, with the harsh repression of 1897.

SOCIALIST WEAKNESS AND OPPOSITION TO CATALAN NATIONALISM

The socialist trade union *Unió General de Treballadors* (General Workers' Union, UGT) was founded in Barcelona in 1888, and its leadership was initially located in this city. The *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Spanish So-

cialist Workers' Party, PSOE) was rebooted in the same city in the same year, but socialism was not highly developed in Catalonia, even though it was the home to the bulk of the industrial working-class population in Spain and this in theory should have favoured socialism. The PSOE's leadership was always in Madrid, and given the UGT's close dependence on the party, it is not surprising that the union leadership would also end up moving to the capital city in 1899. This move was implicit acknowledgement of the failure of socialism in Catalonia, yet it was also one of the causes of its weakness in the region during the first three decades of the twentieth century, a weakness which, in turn, limited the power of socialism throughout Spain as a whole. Even prior to 1936, the predominance of anarcho-syndicalism in the workers' movement in Catalonia was interpreted as the manifestation of an anti-centralist particularism in Catalonia, even though the anarchists rejected any identification with the Catalan national movement.¹

The widespread conviction among Catalan workers that unions should be independent of any political party worked against the UGT, as did the centralisation of socialism in Madrid, given that its equation with state centralism was viewed poorly by many workers in Catalonia, even those who did not identify with the Catalanist parties. When Miguel de Unamuno asked a Catalan worker why socialism was weak in Catalonia, the worker responded, 'Because it comes from Madrid'.

It is worth noting that by using internationalism as the justification for opposing Catalan nationalism, the PSOE was following the patterns of the majority of European socialists within the Second International.²

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The PSOE remained incompatible with republicans of all stripes on behalf of worker maximalism until 1910, although this did not keep it from exercising remarkable moderation in the practice of social conflict. In 1907, Catalan socialists' determined collaboration to create a single, plural union in Barcelona, *Solidaritat Obrera* (Worker Solidarity), seemed to allow socialism to overcome its isolation for a time.³ However, after Tragic Week in July 1909, anarcho-syndicalism turned *Solidaritat Obrera*, which until then had been circumscribed to Catalonia, into the Spain-wide *Confederació Nacional del Treball* (National Labour Confederation, CNT), which became a rival of the UGT, forcing the socialists to withdraw.

In 1910, the PSOE set aside its incompatibility with the republicans to join them in an electoral coalition: the *Conjunció Republicano-socialista* (Republican-Socialist Conjunction). Thanks to this cooperation, the PSOE won its first MP in Congress, Pablo Iglesias Posse, at a time when the socialists in France and Italy already had a considerable parliamentary minority. Shortly thereafter, the PSOE supported the entry of the *Unió Federal Nacionalista Republicana* (Republican Nationalist Federal Union)—the unified Catalanist left—into the *Conjunció Republicano-socialista*, which took place immediately after Lerroux's *Partit Republicà Radical* (Radical Republican Party) and the *Partit Radical* (Radical Party) had been ousted from the *Conjunció*; the latter had considerable power in Barcelona and was anti-Catalanist.⁴

CONTACTS BETWEEN SOCIALISM AND CATALANISM

But the disintegration of the Catalanist republican party after the failure of its 1914 electoral alliance with the *Partit Radical*, which had been its rival until then, created a vacuum on the left wing of political Catalanism. Given the risk that Catalanism would be monopolised by the *Lliga Regionalista* (Regionalist League), a conservative party, which would distance it from the working class, Domènec Martí i Julià, the president of the *Unió Catalanista* (Catalanist Union) since 1903, tried to fill the void by turning this unitary, apolitical entity founded in 1892 into a Catalanist social-democratic party, which he attempted unsuccessfully in 1916.⁵

He tried to do this without any contact with the thesis that Lenin had introduced to the Bolshevik agenda in 1912, namely that revolutionary socialism had to support the emancipation of subjugated nationalities and acknowledge their right to self-determination, including secession. Martí i Julià's main collaborators were Manuel Serra i Moret and Antoni Rovira i Virgili. Martí i Julià claimed that socialism could not ally with the oppression of any nationality and stated that authentic, legitimate internationalism required the emancipation of oppressed nationalities in order to achieve equality among nations, the sole foundation of world peace as a bulwark against

any form of imperialism. This attempt to construct a socialist party within the Catalan national movement failed due to the apolitical inertia of the *Unió Catalanista*, which at that time was an ineffectual entity.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks subordinated the subjugated nationalities' claims to the revolutionary opportunities of the proletariat, on behalf of whom he spoke about the only workers' party considered valid. It had to be organised on a state-wide scale, not by nationalities in a plurinational state like Russia. The Leninist tenet that the workers' party was supposed to combat the nationalism of the bourgeoisie through fraternity with the workers of other nationalities was recommendable in the case of two hostile states like France and Germany in 1913, but mistaken within a state where one nationality dominates others, and, in fact, that may objectively be equivalent to supporting the dominant nation on behalf of proletarian internationalism in the case of a dominated nationality. Workers' organisations in Spain did not hold campaigns in favour of the rights of a nation like the Catalans, nor had they prepared the Spanish workers who had moved to Catalonia to join the Catalan national claims instead of being passive allies of the domination that was one of the foundations of the Spanish bourgeoisie's power. Andreu Nin summarised this contradiction in this way in 1935: 'So many pseudo-internationalists from our country take a hostile attitude to the Catalan problem on behalf of an internationalism that in practice entails the hegemony of the Castilian nation above the others!'⁶

After 1914, the establishment of the *Mancomunitat* as a federation of the four provincial councils bolstered Catalan national consciousness. At the same time, the Catalan Federation of the PSOE was formulating the demand for the party to adopt a decentralised structure and declare itself in favour of Catalonia's autonomy.⁷ The Reus native Josep Recasens i Mercadé promoted this in 1916.⁸ This start of a shift in orientation attracted Manuel Serra i Moret, Rafael Campalans (director of the *Escola del Treball*), Andreu Nin, Ramon Pla i Armengol and other former republican nationalist militants to the PSOE, thus promoting socialism's pro-autonomy turn.

In November 1918, right after the end of the First World War, which led to the independence of a series of European nationalities, the PSOE included the attainment of a 'Republican federation of the Iberian nationalities' in its programme. At the same time, the five MPs from the small socialist minority in the Spanish Congress supported the draft statute of Catalonia, the outcome of the Catalan pro-autonomy campaign held in late 1918 and early 1919. In contrast, the CNT declared its sceptical reservations about the campaign and criticised the fact that it was supported by the socialists. The pro-autonomy campaign stumbled upon the lack of support of the monarchic majority in the Spanish Congress in January 1919 and was eclipsed by the *La Canadenca* (electric company) strike in Barcelona, which ushered in a series of harsh social conflicts in Catalonia that lasted until 1923.

THE UNIÓ SOCIALISTA DE CATALUNYA (SOCIALIST UNION OF CATALONIA) AND THE DIVISION OF CATALAN SOCIALISTS

After 1919, PSOE's turn in favour of Catalan autonomy was left behind as thus far it had clearly yielded the socialists no progress in either elections or union membership in Catalonia. Those were the years of the degeneration of the class struggle due to *pistolerisme* (social violence) in Barcelona and other Catalan cities. At the same time, Spanish socialism was weakening due to the schism with communism in 1921, and all of this led the PSOE into a defensive retreat and a return to the old thesis of the incompatibility between socialism and Catalanism articulated by Antoni Fabra Ribas in 1923.⁹ At that time, Manuel Serra i Moret, Rafael Campalans, Gabriel Alomar and others created the Unió Socialista de Catalunya (Socialist Union of Catalonia, USC) in July 1923 and started publishing the weekly *Justícia Social*, the first socialist newspaper in the Catalan language. They earned the sympathy of former PSOE members like Josep Comaposada and spread the idea that only an organically autonomous and politically pro-autonomy socialism would be able to overcome its chronic weakness in Catalonia.¹⁰ At the same time, they promoted a workers' front, which nonetheless stumbled upon the inflexible apoliticism of the anarcho-syndicalists and the retreat of the PSOE.¹¹



FIGURE 1. Rafael Campalans, Catalan socialist, 1931

Serra i Moret and his fellow USC members did not want to be considered nationalists, because nationalism was associated with the political right in the rest of Europe. However, in the newspaper *La Publicitat* on 28 May 1923, Antoni Rovira i Virgili responded: 'to us, nationalism is the tendency that proclaims the right of all nations to have their own state and to freely organise their own life. In this sense, Catalan socialists are also nationalists. It doesn't matter if they don't want to admit it.'

We should recall that six years earlier, the Bolshevik revolution in Russia had aroused such enthusiasm in Catalonia that the CNT had affiliated itself with the Communist International of Moscow in late 1919. In September 1920, Francesc Layret and Lluís Companys managed to get the Partit Republicà Català (Catalan Republican Party) to affiliate with it as well. However, this agreement ended up evaporating. The CNT broke off with the Communist International in 1922 after hearing the report by Àngel Pestaña, who had been sent to Moscow.

Nonetheless, the prestige of the Soviet model, as the first country where a revolutionary workers' party had taken power, was not undermined.¹² The national claims within the former Russian empire seemed to have been resolved with the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which recognised the right to self-determination of each of them until separation.

Given this backdrop, in 1925 Francesc Macià travelled to Moscow to request—unsuccessfully—communist assistance for his guerrilla penetration of Catalonia at Prats de Molló against the Primo de Rivera dictatorship in November 1926, a venture that was thwarted by the French police. In the 1920s and 1930s, even conservative observers like Josep Pla and Ferran Valls i Taberner and non-communist republican Catalanists like Carles Pi i Sunyer and Antoni Rovira i Virgili believed that the question of nationalities had been resolved in the USSR.

Andreu Nin shared a similar admiration in his book *Els moviments d'emancipació nacional*, published in Barcelona in 1935, even though Nin was a dissident communist who had had to leave Russia in 1930 because he followed Trotsky's theses instead of Stalin's. As a leader who had been in Moscow with the Red International of Labour Unions, Andreu Nin could not ignore the fact that the self-governance of the republics of the Soviet Union with the theoretical right to self-determination had been distorted in practice with events like the Russian invasion of Georgia in 1921 and Ukraine's forced Russification after 1928. The centralism of the single party, which had ended in Stalin's autocracy, contradicted the self-governance of the Soviet republics. In Lenin's thinking, the exercise of the national right to self-determination was subordinated in each case to the benefit this could bring to the communist revolution. Wherever it could not be beneficial, self-determination had to be rejected as an instrument of bourgeois reaction and nationalism.

Following Lenin's theses for Bolshevism in Russia articulated in 1913, in 1935 Andreu Nin recommended that

the revolutionary party remain a single party for the entire state instead of being organised by nationalities.¹³ Both the Bloc Obrer i Camperol (Worker and Peasant Bloc, BOC) led by Joaquim Maurín and Jordi Arquer, created in March 1931 due to strategic disagreement with the Partido Comunista de España (Communist Party of Spain, PCE), and the Esquerra Comunista d'Espanya (Communist Left of Spain), the Trotskyite nucleus led by Andreu Nin, sought to encompass all of Spain, even though the vast majority of their members and leadership were in Catalonia.¹⁴ The Partit Obrer d'Unificació Marxista (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, POUM), the outcome of a merger between the BOC and the EC in November 1935, also wanted to encompass Spain as a whole. They totally supported the Catalan national claims, which were regarded as a revolutionary factor in the destabilisation of the oligarchic Spanish state, just as Lenin had declared during the Bolshevik revolution with regard to the nationalities subjugated by the Tsarist empire.¹⁵

However, let us go back to 1923. The USC had not wanted to split off from the PSOE, but it ended up being expelled because of both the centralism that prevailed within Spanish socialism and the PSOE's accommodation to the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, a position that was wholly unacceptable to the Catalanist socialists. The USC ceased operating in 1926.¹⁶ Some of its followers had rejoined the PSOE, but Spanish socialism's opportunism during those years led to naught. In Catalonia, the PSOE did not gain more members in the second half of the 1920s, and the UGT did not manage to fill the void temporarily left by the CNT. Therefore, after the Primo de Rivera dictatorship ended in 1930, the CNT regained union hegemony in Catalonia.

THE YEARS OF THE REPUBLIC AND THE ATTEMPTS TO UNIFY SOCIALISM IN CATALONIA

In the elections held on 14 April 1931, the reorganised Unió Socialista de Catalunya ran in a coalition with the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia, ERC), which became the hegemonic party in Catalonia during the five years of the Republic. By maintaining this coalition, the USC achieved much stronger parliamentary representation and a greater presence in the governments of the Generalitat than what it would proportionally have had for its membership had it run alone. But the downside was that it became a satellite of the dominant party, from which it differed little in the voters' eyes.

The PSOE, which became the leading parliamentary minority in the constituent courts of the first two-year period of the Republic from 1931-1933 and was present for the first time in the Spanish government, took a stance that was largely unfavourable towards Catalan autonomy. Furthermore, along with other republicans, it opposed the transfer of education to the Generalitat, although it did end up voting for the Statute in September 1932.

Nonetheless, it hindered and restricted the transfer of tax resources to the Generalitat in 1933.

However, the USC and the Federació Catalana of the PSOE agreed to merge in 1933, with the predominance of the former, associating the unified Catalan party with its Spanish counterpart. This unification was ultimately thwarted by both Madrid and Barcelona in 1934. The UGT in Catalonia remained under the leadership of those who remained in the PSOE, yet their numbers were very modest compared to the CNT. Spain-wide, the percentage of Catalan members within the UGT, which had grown considerably since 1931, was quite small.

The Aliança Obrera (Workers' Alliance), to which the PSOE's Catalan Federation belonged, backed the proclamation of the Catalan state within the Spanish Federal Republic by the president of the Generalitat, Lluís Companys, on 6 October 1934, to counter the entrance of the reactionary Catholic right into a government presided over by Alejandro Lerroux and the involution caused by the nullification of the Catalan Parliament's law on cultivation contracts in favour of the peasant *rabassaires*, who sharecropped the vineyards. Lately there has been a tendency to deliberately forget that Companys' insurrection was not a separatist act but was instead linked with the Spanish socialists' general revolutionary strike against a situation which was considered dangerous for the Republic within the context of the rise of fascism around Europe. Months earlier, in January 1934, Indalecio Prieto, who had previously been against Catalan autonomy, had described autonomous Catalonia as the Republic's bastion against the danger facing it.

The socialists and communists—though there were still few of the latter in Spain—were part of the Front Popular (Popular Front), and with its electoral victory in February 1936, Catalonia regained its autonomy and Companys and his ministers were released from jail and returned to the Generalitat.

The thesis of the three stages in the history of political Catalanism, which Joaquim Maurín began to formulate in the newspaper *La Batalla* in 1931, was adopted and developed by the communists. In the first stage, during the monarchy, the bourgeoisie—who politically identified with the Lliga Regionalista—had dominated the Catalan national movement, but it capitulated, afraid afraid of the labour movement. Afterwards the lower middle class—identified by Maurín with the Esquerra Republicana of Macià and Companys—directed the Catalan national movement, but its impotence was proven by its surrender on 17 April 1931 and the overthrow on 6 October 1934, which revealed that only the working class, guided by the revolutionary party that was at its front line, could meet the demand for Catalan national emancipation and would do so as it imposed the social revolution among both workers and peasants. First it would proclaim the Catalan Republic, which would then establish the Union of Iberian Socialist Republics, in solidarity with the Spanish revolutionary proletariat.

But this required a strong Marxist party, which did not exist in Catalonia because of the extreme fragmentation of the socialist and communist space there. This fragmentation made it more difficult for the Marxists to carve a niche for themselves amidst the predominance of the ERC in elections and the CNT in union membership. A unification was imposed that was not facilitated by the dogmatism of the era. First the BOC of Joaquim Maurín and the EC of Andreu Nin merged into the POUM in November 1935. The other socialist and communist organisations more gradually negotiated their own unification, which was greatly facilitated by the shift in favour of the popular fronts decided by the Communist International, which was justifiably alarmed at the progress of fascism in Europe after Hitler gained power in Germany in 1933 and the threat that this posed to the USSR. They were forced to acknowledge the disastrous effects of the previous communist strategy of ‘class versus class’ and the communists’ combat against the social democrats, whom they labelled ‘social traitors’. Now, the communists started to defend the popular fronts against fascism in both Spain and France, so they forged a coalition not only with the socialists but also with the democratic left, which until then had been given the disparaging name of the ‘bourgeois left’.

At the same time, the goal was to promote the reunification of the communists and socialists in both politics and trade unions.¹⁷ But this did not mean abandoning Leninism and replacing it with democratic pluralism. This was the heart of the Stalinist era, when communism continued to operate as a global party with guidelines that the parties of each nation had to follow without debate. There was a contradiction between the defence of democracy against fascism in Western Europe and the glorification of Stalin’s autocracy with the successive purges beginning in Moscow in August 1936, which liquidated

virtually all the old-guard Bolsheviks, even the Soviet consul Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko in 1937, who had arrived in Barcelona in the autumn of 1936.

UNIFICATION OF SOCIALISTS AND COMMUNISTS IN CATALONIA WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

In the spring of 1936, negotiations got underway to form the Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya (Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia, PSUC), with Joan Comorera as the secretary general, through a merger with the USC, the largest group; the Partit Català Proletari (Catalan Proletarian Party), which arose from the former Estat Català (Catalan State); the Federació Catalana of the PSOE; and the tiny Partit Comunista Català (Catalan Communist Party).

This merger was driven by the fact that the new unified party would adhere to the Communist International, which accepted it, an exceptional instance of it admitting a party that did not correspond to a state.¹⁸ The unification was rushed along four days after the Spanish Civil War got started in a revolutionary context which seemed to favour anarcho-syndicalist hegemony in Catalonia, although later it also led to the growth of the UGT and the PSUC until they reached dimensions that had never before been seen in Catalonia.¹⁹

The members of the PSUC were proud that a Catalan party that was formally independent was directly recognised by the Communist International, but in reality the latter did not see it as the Catalan national party but as the exemplary forerunner of the desired Spain-wide unification of the PCE and the PSOE, a totally unlikely unification that was only achieved with the union of the UGT and the socialist and communist youths.²⁰ On the other



FIGURE 2. Joan Comorera, general secretary of the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia at a rally in 1936.

hand, because the Communist International determined the strategy of all its member parties, the PSUC had to follow the same line as its Spanish counterpart. In late September 1936, a government of the Generalitat was formed with the ERC, CNT-FAI (the latter the Federación Anarquista Ibérica or the Iberian Anarchist Federation), PSUC, POUM and the Unió de Rabassaires (the sharecroppers' union).

The rivalry with the POUM for the same political space was aggravated by its condemnation of the trials in Moscow, which may have been untimely given the fact that Stalin's USSR was the sole power that the Republic could rely on in view of the considerable assistance that General Franco was receiving from Hitler and Mussolini. The PSUC managed to exclude Andreu Nin from the government of the Generalitat in December 1936. Treated like Trotskyite traitors, the POUM members were afraid of becoming the victims of a liquidation similar to what was happening in the Moscow trials. In Barcelona in early May 1937, the POUM was dragged into the uprising that was a test of strength between the PSUC and the ERC on the one hand and the anarchists on the other, and paid dearly for it. It was outlawed, and its leader Andreu Nin disappeared, assassinated. The CNT had to leave the government of the Republic and of the Generalitat, but it kept its other posts even though some anarchists were imprisoned. Thereafter, the government of the Generalitat had an ERC-PSUC cabinet.

After the intervention of the central republican power from Valencia in the events of May 1937, and especially after the government of the republic moved to Barcelona in October 1937, the downswing in Catalan autonomy and the increase in communist influence in the police and the army placed the ERC in an increasingly uncomfortable position. In August 1938, it ended up withdrawing the minister that represented it in the Negrín government. However, instead of joining the protest, the PSUC reaffirmed its support for the head of government of the Republic. Negrín replaced the minister who resigned from the ERC, Jaume Aiguader, with one from the PSUC, Josep Moix. This quarantined the loyalty of the PSUC as a Catalan national party and justified the accusation of its subordination to the PCE. The secretary general of the PSUC, Joan Comorera, condemned any separatist tendencies, but even this did not earn the trust of the PCE, given that Togliatti was not above labelling the secretary general of the PSUC a petit-bourgeois traitor in one of his reports to Moscow as a delegate of the Communist International.²¹

The defeat and exile of the Catalan republicans came only six months before the German-Soviet pact in which Stalin gave Hitler the green light to invade Poland, unleashing the Second World War. In exchange, the USSR occupied Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, along with part of the territory of the Polish state, and it attacked Finland.

In 1940, only one-third of the members of the PSUC's 1936 central committee remained. The unified party was 'disunited'. Many from the former USC followed Manuel

Serra i Moret in establishing the Moviment Socialista de Catalunya (Socialist Movement of Catalonia, MSC), along with former POUM members like Josep Rovira and Josep Pallach. The MSC was founded in Toulouse in 1945 after the Second World War.²²

With the Nazi-fascist defeat, the USSR became a great power and communism conquered ground throughout Eastern Europe and East Germany. In this new context, the PSUC was reassembled, but the Cold War kept it isolated for a long time, while in 1949 its leader, Joan Comorera, was expelled for attempting to defend the PSUC's independence from the PCE in exile. Comorera was accused of bourgeois nationalism and Titoism, referring to the fact that Tito's Yugoslavia was the only communist state in Europe that was not subordinated to the USSR. Comorera was the last victim of the purges that he had begun in 1939 with the imposition of Stalinist orthodoxy. Once the PSUC's political dependence had been guaranteed in 1949, organic dependence was no longer needed, and therefore not imposed. This revealed after the fact that Comorera had been right; arrested and sentenced after he secretly returned to Catalonia, he died in prison in Burgos in 1958. The PSUC continued using the Catalan language in its publications.

In 1961, the PSUC published a leaflet entitled *El problema nacional català* (The Catalan National Problem) in Mexico with Nous Horitzons, which was completed later with a second part published in 1966. It provided an interpretative historical synthesis; without mentioning Maurín, it did not veer from his theses, although it did contain an extemporaneous condemnation of the 'Trotskyite adventurers and their manoeuvres' to split off. The second part claimed that the bourgeoisie had been able to instrumentalise the Catalan national movement because Catalonia was a nation. 'It would be absurd to reduce the Catalan national problem to a simple epiphenomenon of the—self-serving, classist—political action of the Catalan bourgeoisie... but it would be equally absurd to consider the Catalan national problem without considering the class struggle'. Instead, it claimed, the bourgeoisie 'uses Catalan national sentiment as a platform for its class interests'. But 'the historical experience of the Catalan national movement demonstrates, in our view, that neither the petty nor the middle-class bourgeoisie are forces that can lead to the full realisation of the liberating objectives'. Ultimately, the PSUC, which regarded itself as the workers' front line, posited itself as 'the weapon needed to ensure the direction of the Catalan national movement and—along with all the democratic forces in the country—bring it to the full realisation of its objectives, to the effective exercise of the right of self-determination within the framework of a democratic Spain'.

Determinism served to maintain the moral of secrecy. The PSUC's position on the Catalan national question cannot be disentangled from the quest for an anti-Franco front, which was not easy to combine with the delegitimation of the new Catalanism that had come to the fore

since the late 1950s.²³ Even as late as 1962, Santiago Carrillo said that it was essential to struggle to wrest the banner of nationalism from the hands of the bourgeoisie. The second part of the essay *El problema nacional català* contained a note on the partly 'allogeneous' composition of the Catalan working class, warning that a nationalistic approach that ignored the social problem would distance this group from the Catalan national movement and could turn it into an unwitting instrument of centralist reaction. This was a germane observation, as the majority of the population in towns like L'Hospitalet de Llobregat and Santa Coloma de Gramenet had not been born in Catalonia.

In 1961, the PSUC condemned the idea of the Països Catalans (Catalan Lands) as a remnant of Catalan bourgeois imperialism, even though the unity of the Principality of Catalonia, the region of Valencia and the Balearic Islands, that is, the Catalan-speaking lands, increasingly became part of the programme within anti-Franco circles throughout the 1960s.

In 1967, Jordi Solé Tura, who had been excluded from the PSUC in 1964, published *Catalanisme i revolució burgesa. La síntesi de Prat de la Riba*, a book that unleashed a controversy around his thesis, which stated that the history of Catalan nationalism is the history of a thwarted bourgeois revolution.²⁴ It should be borne in mind that the author's rejection of *La Nacionalitat Catalana* (1906), the most famous book by Prat de la Riba, while it was still impossible to reissue it in Franco-era Spain, sparked indignation. The bourgeois revolution had taken place between 1837 and 1840, even though the Catalan bourgeoisie had played a subordinate, peripheral role in it. Instead of autonomous industrial capitalism, as the Catalan bourgeoisie wanted, agrarian, mercantile capitalism subordinated to foreign capital was instated.

Ten years later, in 1977, Rafael Ribó, who subsequently became the secretary general of the PSUC after 1986, acknowledged that most of the Marxist analyses of nationalism had been purely strategic and that there had been no in-depth dialectic, while the topic had been treated as a phenomenon outside the revolutionary movement.²⁵

Twelve years after the incomplete destalinisation undertaken in the USSR in 1956, the Soviet military occupied Czechoslovakia in 1968, leading the Italian, French and Spanish communists to abandon pro-sovietism and adopt Eurocommunism. This entailed accepting political pluralism and the democratic road to power, in acknowledgement of the social changes that had taken place in recent decades. This earned the PSUC a great deal of sympathy in the waning years of the Franco regime. However, in reality Eurocommunism meant abandoning Leninism and replacing it with democratic socialism. This ideological shift, coupled with the fact that there was no democratic rupture in Spain after Franco's death but instead the Transition and reform, and the electoral frustration when the socialists beat the communists after 1977, plunged the PSUC, which had been the main anti-Franco

party in Catalonia, into an inexorable decline after 1981. In an article published in *El País* on 21 January 1981, Manuel Sacristán, who had left the PSUC in 1978, interpreted the PSUC's crisis not only as working-class members' rejection of Eurocommunism and the Moncloa agreements between parties and unions but also as a class uprising against the team "of professionals of the word, primarily by construction workers in the Vallés and Bajo Llobregat". On the other hand, Santiago Carrillo's efforts to restore the Eurocommunist direction of the PSUC once again cast doubt on the Catalan party's actual independence from the PCE.

Some years later, in 1987, the aegis of Iniciativa per Catalunya (Initiative for Catalonia) enabled the PSUC to salvage what it could from the shipwreck. But two years later, communism was dealt a decisive blow with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the demise of communism in East Germany, the rest of Eastern Europe and even the Soviet Union, which was dissolved in 1991 with Russia's separation from the Baltic republics, Ukraine and the Caucasian republics. This revealed the flimsiness of a union which had been considered cemented first by the socialist revolution and later by the victory over the German invasion in 1941. Yugoslavia also fell into a violent disintegration starting in 1991 and became six independent republics instead of the former federal republic.

In 2016, Iniciativa per Catalunya became diluted within the conglomerate called Catalunya en Comú-Podem (Catalonia in Common-We Can).

THE CATALAN SOCIALISTS UNDER THE FRANCO REGIME

We must now go back 30 years to analyse the evolution of the socialist currents in Catalonia under the Franco regime. After the 1958 fall of active members, the MSC was weakened and lost political dynamism, as new underground organisations were created without ties to either exiles or the past. They were the Front Obrer de Catalunya (Workers' Front of Catalonia, FOC), established as a party in 1962, and the Força Socialista Federal (Federal Socialist Force, FSF), a group formed in 1964 on the initiative of several former Comunitat Catalana (Catalan Community, CC) members.²⁶ Just like the MSC, they were also independent from the rest of Spain yet highly critical of both European social democracy and the communist model in the East. In both cases, there was early collaboration with atheists and progressive Christians from scouting and militant Christian organisations like Joventut Obrera Cristiana (Young Christian Workers, JOC), from an anti-Francoism influenced by Marxism. The referents adopted by the FOC were federalism and worker self-management, which they believed had been achieved in an idealised Yugoslavia despite the Milovan Djilas book *The New Class* (1957). The FOC was less concerned with the Catalan question than the MSC and the

FSF. It hoped that the socialist revolution with federalism would almost automatically solve the Catalan national problem. The revolutions in Cuba and Algeria also earned the sympathy and admiration of FOC members.

The FOC acted intensely in labour matters and contributed to the formation of the Comissions Obreres (Workers' Commissions, CCOO) union in Barcelona in 1964, where it vied for leadership with the PSUC.²⁷ However, the FOC ended up plunging into a spiral of leftist radicalisation, which led to its demise in 1969, one year after the FSF had disintegrated for similar reasons.

In 1968, it became evident that the FOC's position on the Catalan national problem differed from the PSUC's. The PSUC joined the events held on 11 September—Catalan national day, which was banned by the Franco regime—as it had done in 1967, while the FOC refused to support them because it believed that 'wanting a Catalan nationalism based on linguistic and cultural claims [that] was an outmoded, absurd undertaking' was obsolete, while it added, 'we cannot become more nationalist than the bourgeoisie, that is, become appendages of the bourgeois movements'.

In the late 1960s, there was a proliferation of leftist leaflets sparked by discomfiture with the repressive, continuationist capacity of the late Franco regime, demonstrated by the state of exception in 1969. The extremism of some anti-Franco groups, which viewed themselves as Leninist, Trotskyite and Maoist, tended to come hand in hand with indifference to Catalan national claims.²⁸

But counter to this fragmentation, a powerful united current was burgeoning from the neighbourhood movement and the CCOO, which gave rise to the *Assemblea de Catalunya* (Assembly of Catalonia) in 1971. With its three points of freedom, amnesty and the Statute of Autonomy, this platform promoted the association of the workers' movement with the restoration of the 1932 Statute as the first step towards Catalan self-determination, with the compensatory add-on of solidarity with the other peoples of Spain.²⁹

The *Assemblea de Catalunya* was supported not only by the PSUC and the socialists from the MSC but also by other new underground parties like the *Partit Socialista d'Alliberament Nacional dels Països Catalans* (Socialist Party of the National Liberation of the Catalan Lands, PSAN), founded in 1969 after splitting off with the *Front Nacional de Catalunya* (National Front of Catalonia).³⁰ The PSAN associated pro-independence with Marxism-Leninism, while its national area encompassed all the Catalan lands: Catalonia, the region of Valencia and the Balearic Islands. The survival of the myth of the USSR was still salient enough that in 1968, Josep Ferrer, the PSAN's ideologue, said that the Soviet Union was an exemplary solution to national diversity, despite 'some genocides' and the survival of Russian imperialism. The paragraph was reproduced in the book that Ferrer published in 1978.³¹ Many pro-independence groups sprang up in the wake of the PSAN, which became one of the origins of

Terra Lliure (Free Land), which had abandoned its armed struggle in 1991 and dissolved itself in 1995.³² Some former *Terra Lliure* members later joined the ERC.

THE PSC-PSOE AND THE AUTONOMY OF CATALONIA

Now let us go back the main thread tracing Catalan socialism until today. In 1974, *Convergència Socialista de Catalunya* (Socialist Convergence of Catalonia) was created by members of the MSC, the now-defunct FOC and other sectors. Their purpose was to create an egalitarian federation of socialist parties around Spain. They also had the steadfast goal of restoring the *Generalitat* and securing the return of its president in exile, Josep Tarradellas. In 1976, the *Partit Socialista de Catalunya (Congrés)* (Socialist Party of Catalonia [Congress], PSC *Congrés*) was created to distinguish it from Josep Pallach's *Partit Socialista de Catalunya Reagrupament* (Regrouped Socialist Party of Catalonia, PSC *Reagrupament*), which, unlike the other socialists, was the enemy of any collaboration with the communists, not even on behalf of anti-Francoism or the unity of the labour struggle in the CCOO. This discrepancy had been dividing the socialists in the MSC since 1966.³³



FIGURE 3. Electoral poster of Joan Reventós, Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSC), 1980

For the first democratic elections in June 1976, the PSC Congrés and the Catalan Federation of the PSOE established an electoral coalition which became the winning candidacy in Catalonia, although not in Spain as a whole. In 1978, the PSC and the Catalan Federation of the PSOE merged on equal terms, including the majority from the former PSC Reagrupament.³⁴ This heralded the creation of the Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (Socialist Party of Catalonia, PSC), which was considered a party federated with the PSOE—because it was Catalonia-wide—as opposed to a mere regional federation of it. Its identification as a federated party seemed to be confirmed in 1979, when the central leadership of the PSOE did not support the former members of the Catalan Federation, who were at odds with the others, who constituted the majority. The Catalanist socialists gained a foothold in the PSC-PSOE leadership with Joan Reventós. In exchange, the members of the unified party had to join the UGT trade union, not the CCOO, as many members of the PSC Congrés had done until then. That same year, Spanish socialism abandoned Marxism as its official doctrine, and the Catalan socialists followed suit implicitly.

Despite its Catalanism, for many years the PSC did not manage to transfer its positive results in the general elections and the municipal elections in Catalonia to the regional elections. Against all predictions, it lost the elections to the first Parliament in Catalonia in 1980, which had been created following the 1979 Statute.

In 1970, 37% of the population Catalonia had been born outside it, and this figure was still 36% in 2005. The PSC made a decisive contribution to preventing workers from the first and second generations who had reached Catalonia from the rest of Spain during the massive migrations in the 1950s and 1960s from being led down the path of anti-Catalanism. The PSC truly wanted to create a single people in Catalonia. However, the socialists kept losing all the elections to the Parliament of Catalonia as they won the general elections here, and this revealed the existence of major abstentions in the regional elections by a socialist Spanish-speaking part of the electorate.³⁵

For 23 years, bipartisanship in Catalonia gained a foothold with a socialist majority in the city of Barcelona, the towns in its metropolitan area and the industrial cities, and control of the Generalitat by the centrist Catalanism of the *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (Democratic Convergence of Catalonia), with its ally the *Unió Democràtica de Catalunya* (Democratic Union of Catalonia)—Christian democrats—under the leadership of a president, Jordi Pujol, whose authority was uncontested, and with absolute majorities in the Parliament of Catalonia during the 1984, 1988 and 1992 legislatures. Meantime, the creation of Catalan public television and radio channels and the teaching of Catalan and *in* Catalan in public schools halted the language shift among the Catalan-speaking population and promoted knowledge of the Catalan language among the younger Spanish-speaking population.

The Catalan national image of the PSC deteriorated for a number of reasons. The first was the LOAPA syndrome named after the law on the harmonisation of the autonomous communities, which limited the implementation of the autonomous communities around Spain, which the MPs from the PSC voted for in Congress, much to their chagrin, in 1981; then came the PSC's loss of the right to have a parliamentary majority in the Spanish legislative chambers; and thirdly was the fact that the PSOE governments had Catalan ministers yet nonetheless appealed laws in the Constitutional Court that the PSC MPs had voted for in the Parliament of Catalonia, such as the 1983 Law on Linguistic Normalisation.

All of this prevented the PSC from becoming the leading party in terms of the number of votes in Catalan regional elections until 2003. However, by not winning an absolute majority of seats in these elections, Pasqual Maragall had to form the first tripartite government of the Generalitat with the ERC and *Iniciativa per Catalunya els Verds* (Initiative for Catalonia-Greens).³⁶

At that time, this government was promoting the reform of the 1979 Statute of Catalonia. The goal was to prevent Catalonia's autonomous capacity from being tempered by laws based on central power in the future and to stop the continued tax deficit that was unfavourable to Catalonia. All of this was tantamount to calling for Catalonia to be recognised as a nation. In short, the ambi-

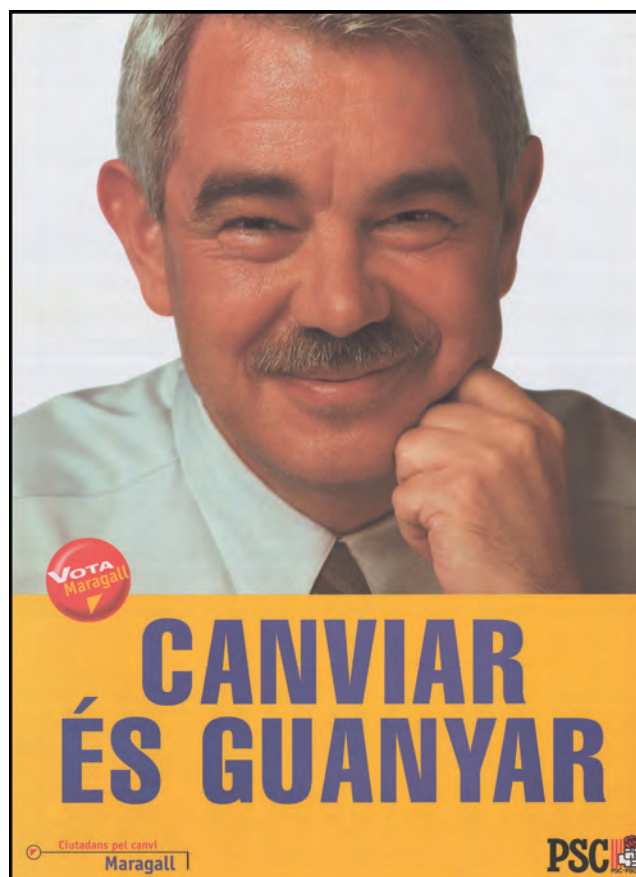


FIGURE 4. Electoral poster of Pasqual Maragall, 2003

guities and shortcomings of the pact between Catalonia and Spain from the Transition had to be overcome, as that pact had been conditioned in 1978 by the threat of a military coup, like the one waged in Madrid and Valencia in February 1981, which had consequences despite its failure.

In 2004, the Spanish socialists regained the Spanish government, and this led to expectations that the Spanish legislature would accept the reform of the Catalan Statute. The president of the government, Rodríguez Zapatero, declared: 'I will support the Statute that the Parliament of Catalonia approves'. In 2005, 120 MPs from the Parliament of Catalonia voted in favour of the bill, that is, all of them except the 15 from the Partit Popular (People's Party, PP). But the Catalan bill was significantly trimmed in the Spanish Congress: according to the socialist Alfonso Guerra, 'le pasamos el cepillo' (we gutted it). Nonetheless, the 2006 Statute was ultimately ratified by 73% of the voters in Catalonia in a referendum with 49% voter turnout. Voting against it was advocated not only by the PP but also by the ERC, because it believed that the restrictions imposed on it by the Spanish legislature were unacceptable. Nonetheless, the ERC was once again part of the second tripartite government presided over by José Montilla, who governed the Generalitat from 2006 to 2010. Montilla, the former mayor of Cornellà with roots in Andalusia, represented the predominance of mayors in the towns around Barcelona in the PSC-PSOE, and he had become the first secretary of the PSC-PSOE in 2000.

The PP appealed the 2006 Statute in the Constitutional Court, and it was substantially amended by the 2010 ruling, which 'blasted Catalonia's political pact within Spain to bits', in the words of Antoni Castells, the former socialist minister of finances of the Generalitat.³⁷ Since then, Catalonia is the only autonomous community in Spain that has a Statute that has not been approved by its citizens. The October 2017 referendum had a voter turnout of 43% and two million votes in favour of independence, even though it had been banned by the Spanish government. This led to repression, the temporary suspension of Catalan autonomy and prison sentences for nine political and social leaders, along with the exile of the president of the Generalitat and some ministers from his government.

The PSC has always declared itself federalist when resolving Catalonia's national claims, but a federation is only possible if both sides have the will to negotiate. Until now, the facts have shown that there are virtually no federalists in Spain, and in fact the 1978 Constitution is not only not federal but cannot lead to a federal system. Since 2010, the Catalan pro-independence movement, until then very minor, has surged until garnering the support of 47.8% of the voters in 2015. The consequences for the PSC have been negative. In the 2017 Parliament of Catalonia elections, the PSC-PSOE was the party with the fourth most votes, with only 13.8% and 17 seats, far from the 31% of votes and 42 seats that the Catalan socialists had won in 2003. The Catalan elections in March 2021

pointed to a socialist recovery, as it became the party with the most votes, yet it did not have enough MPs to govern and was therefore condemned to the role of the first opposition party in the pro-independence coalition government in the Generalitat de Catalunya. Despite its divisions and citizen exhaustion, the pro-independence movement earned 41% of the votes in the March 2021 elections, but this consultation also had one of the lowest voter turnouts in Catalan regional elections. The Catalan political and social leaders imprisoned since 2017 had not yet been released. They were pardoned in June 2021.

But this is now the present time, not historical knowledge. Throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, a general conclusion can be reached about the topic discussed in this article: socialists of all stripes—both inside and outside Catalonia—have had to grapple with what is known as the 'Catalan question', whose importance has not diminished. Without true self-governance in Catalonia, there is no authentic democracy in Spain, and vice-versa: to suffocate the Catalan demands for self-governance, all of Spain has to be subjected to a dictatorship, or at least reactionary authoritarianism that is opposed to what socialism seeks to represent. Catalan nationalism has always been pro-European, and the pro-independence movement wants Catalonia to remain in the European Union.

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