

Fernando Pessoa

## **The very confused political situation in Spain...**

The very confused political situation in Spain can be only approximately understood. It cannot be clearly seen within Spain itself, and the extraordinarily divergent statements of Spanish politicians and "intellectuals" prove that abundantly. The confusion of the country is reflected in the minds of those who would explain it; and it certainly is, to some extent, a product of those very minds. But, if we cannot see clear in Spain within Spain, neither is there any chance of a clear understanding of the situation in such countries as Britain or France — to speak of no others —, in which there is an organic ignorance of Spanish conditions and a temperamental unfitness for the understanding of the Spanish mind. Perhaps here from Portugal, which is neither Spain, for in any respect far from Spain, an intermediate, and therefore a relatively clear, vision may be obtained.

The present situation in Spain presents a striking analogy with the situation in Portugal in 1910, on the verge of the Republic, which was proclaimed on the 5th of October. But the differences are as striking as the resemblances. As in Portugal then, the monarchy is generally discredited. As in Portugal then, the mass of the population is indifferent to politics, and therefore conservative, and therefore implicitly royalist. As in Portugal then, the only active force in the country is the Republican force; it is a minority, as it was in Portugal, but it is an active minority confronting a passive majority. And, as that active minority overthrew the monarchy in Portugal, there is no assurance at all that the Spanish Republicans will not overthrow the monarchy in Spain.

In all countries with an ingrained "constitutional" habit, like Britain, there is a natural disposition to reckon realities on the terms of votes, and to base results on numbers. This is not true anywhere, and it is strikingly false in revolutionary periods. No revolution ever comes out of the heart of a country; no monarchy ever fell with universal or even majority applause. A revolution comes out of a weakening of social cohesion, of a confusion of national ideas, and of the direct action of a minority — of a very small minority — which the majority, however large, is neither organised, nor perhaps even disposed, to resist. The Portuguese Monarchy was overthrown by two regiments, two cruisers and a handful of

civilians. The Portuguese Revolution, which no one expected, was caused by the shooting of a Republican leader, Prof. Bombarda, director of the Lisbon Lunatic Asylum, by a madman — an act which no one connected or thought of connecting, with politics. Out of such minorities, and of such absurdities, does triumph emerge. And the Republic thus formed has withstood Royalists risings, which, in one case, involved all the regiments in the North of the country.

These are the striking resemblances between present Spain and 1910 Portugal. Yet the differences are no less striking. Though the republican currents are the only really active ones in Spain today, yet they are not gathered into one; in Portugal then the Republican Party presented a united front, and the Socialists and Anarchists which it included — though they aimed individually at more than a Republic — did not at the time think of anything further than just overthrowing the Monarchy. They were thus not only active but cohesively active. The same cannot be said of the present Republican currents in Spain: the mental disorganisation of the country has penetrated everywhere: ideas are unfocussed and there is a consequent dispersion of purposes. This may impair the proclamation, or at least the speedy proclamation, or the Republic, which, nevertheless, everybody in Spain seems to think inevitable. And it is to be desired — if desiring means anything — that a Republic should indeed not be proclaimed in such conditions: it is hardly to be desired that a virtual anarchy should come into reality.

Another difference between the two nations and periods, lies in the fact that, whereas no one hated King Manuel in Portugal, the Spanish Republicans and a good number of monarchists do personally hate King Alfonso. The phenomenon was also known in Portugal, but with King Carlos; it is always a dreadful memory for us here in Portugal with what a general sigh of relief Lisbon greeted the news that King Carlos had been assassinated. It is perhaps a shameful fact, but it is no less a fact for that. And so important is the personal factor in politics, especially when the person is a king, that there is no knowing to what degree this bitter hatred of the Head or the State may not fuse together the uncohesive radicals and neutralise any attempt to withstand them among those who are not Republicans.

The third and most important difference — not now between 1910 Portugal and 1930 Spain, but between the two countries in themselves — lies in the fact that Portugal is a completely unified country, a country speaking from North to South, without dialects, the same language, a country so organically one that

its cohesive spirit has passed on to Brazil, which, though so large, has not fallen apart into several republics, Now Spain, far from being a unified country, is not even, in the proper sense of the word, a country at all. It is, at the least, four countries — what is generally called "Spain" within Spain (that is to say, Castile and the other provinces where Spanish is the language, though highly dialectal in some of them), Catalonia, the Basque Provinces and Galicia. These four countries speak different languages. In two cases — Catalan and Basque — the language diverge more from Spanish than does Portuguese, which anyone who reads Spanish can read without learning it, whereas that does not apply to the other two cases; in the third case, Galician, the differences are almost the same as with Portuguese, Galician being, as a matter of fact, an undeveloped Portuguese.

The primary cause of the failure of the Spanish dictatorship lies outside any matter of politics or administration. It was, so to speak, a personal matter. The Spanish Dictatorship had no outstanding personality, no distinctive man. There was no Mussolini, as in Italy, no Salazar, as in Portugal now. Primo de Rivera was outstanding politically; he was not outstanding personally. It is the latter distinctiveness that is really important: Salazar is the man with the greatest prestige to-day in Portugal, he is the man who has held together, though a civilian, the Portuguese Military Government, yet he is not the Head of the State, nor even of the Government, being simply the Minister of Finance.

Personal prestige, always important in politics, is pre-eminently necessary in personal government of any kind. It is a mistake to suppose that personal prestige is logical; there is always some reason for it, as for everything, but that is not the reason that is generally attributed to it. Mussolini's prestige does not lie in his work for Italy, in his reforms, administrative and otherwise. In the first place the prestige preceded the work; in the second place, the public is always incompetent to appreciate administrative matters. The same happened with Salazar in Portugal: he established his prestige at once when he took office, by a single speech which was so different from the usual political speeches that the country took to him at once. And the public is incompetent to appreciate so deeply technical a thing as his financial reforms. Prestige is always non-technical; that is the long and the short of it. I have heard more than one Portuguese business man complain of the stress of present taxation in Portugal; I have heard him, a few minutes after, praise enthusiastically Salazar, that is to say, the man who had imposed that taxation. And he did not praise him on the score of considering such taxation necessary, or for any such practical reason:

the praise and the groan were independent matters, wholly unconnected in the mind of the praising groaner. This is prestige, in all its force and in all its gleaming absurdity.

Now it is this sort of prestige that attached to no man in the Spanish Dictatorship.

s. d.

**Da República (1910 — 1935)** . Fernando Pessoa. (Recolha de textos de Maria Isabel Rocheta e Maria Paula Mourão. Introdução e organização de Joel Serrão). Lisboa: Ática, 1979: 120.