

## The Coming of Liberal Spain

### *Transformation Muted*

Between 1823 and 1840 Spain witnessed further oscillations in her political development. At first plunged into a further period of absolutism, following the death of Fernando VII she acquired a new constitution modelled on the French *charte* of 1814. By that time, however, she was once again at war, the clique who surrounded Fernando's brother, Don Carlos, instigating a massive insurrection. Precisely for this reason, however, the 'royal statute' had no chance of survival: making use of the rhetoric of 1810–14 and 1820–3, the more radical elements of Spanish liberalism rose in revolt, and imposed their own agenda. With Carlism now clearly doomed, the triumph of liberalism seemed assured. Spanish liberalism being deeply divided, however, it took six years of further turmoil to give the new Spain its definitive form, and even then all was far from settled.

### *The Ominous Decade*

Although the decade following 1823 has a dark reputation, how far this is merited is debatable. Let us begin with the repression that accompanied the defeat of liberalism. This was without doubt very sharp. To the accompaniment of much mob violence, a network of military tribunals was established to deal with the personnel of the *trienio*; several prominent figures were executed (examples include Riego and the erstwhile guerrilla leader, El Empecinado); the Church, the bureaucracy, the administration and the judiciary were all purged; the *ayuntamientos* of 1820 were restored; the bulk of the army was disbanded; and much property was confiscated.

Ferocious though it was whilst it lasted, the terror was mitigated by a number of factors. Thus, many French and Spanish officers did what they could to urge moderation. Meanwhile, even the most rabid *apostólico* was aware of the drawbacks of mob violence, the peasant rebels of 1822–3 hastily being incorporated into a new militia known as the

Voluntarios Reales. And, most important of all, growing doubts filled the mind of Fernando himself, the king being desperate to acquire the revenue that he needed to reconquer America. With foreign loans unobtainable except at the most exorbitant rates, the only solution was an alliance with the technocrats of 1814–20, not to mention the trickle of *afrancesados* who had started to return to Spain. As a result, Fernando adopted a middle course, vetoing the re-establishment of the Inquisition, and issuing a partial amnesty. Thus encouraged, the proponents of enlightened absolutism on the whole proved willing to cooperate, Fernando's most important ally in this respect proving to be Luis López Ballesteros, a senior treasury official who became Minister of Finance in 1824.

Rewarded with important positions though many of them were, the *apostólicos* were deeply offended. Bombarding Fernando with protests, they therefore repeatedly clashed with the advocates of moderation, and established a number of secret societies. Much alarmed, the king in turn decided that he could no longer trust his defence to a soon-to-be-withdrawn foreign garrison, a force of disgruntled peasant volunteers and the handful of guard units that was all that remained of the regular army. In consequence, a fresh *quinta* was ordered in the course of 1824, and large numbers of officers recalled to the colours. As little attempt was made to vet the officers concerned, the loyalists of 1821–3 were incensed, and all the more so as their forces were reduced in size and placed under tighter control, and they themselves demoted, dismissed, or even executed.

Furious at these developments, the *apostólicos* began to look to Fernando's notoriously pious younger brother, Don Carlos, whom the king's continued childlessness was making an increasingly likely heir to the throne. Before looking at what followed, however, we should first consider the situation in America. Although Fernando was still dreaming of reconquest, matters had been going from bad to worse. Mexico and Central America were now free, whilst the situation further south was beyond redemption: having liberated Venezuela and Colombia, Bolivar had gone on to free Ecuador in 1823, before smashing the loyalist armies that still dominated the interior of Peru at Ayacucho. All that was left was Bolivia, which Bolivar was easily able to mop up early in 1825. Here and there isolated forces clung on until January 1826, but, Cuba and Puerto Rico aside, the American empire was finished.

In itself, the loss of America had little impact in Spain. The rebellions and civil wars that bedevilled Spain's erstwhile colonies for years to come gave the impression that the loyalist cause was still alive, whilst the economy adjusted to the situation remarkably well. Only with regard to finance was the picture any different. Realizing that the wealth of the

Indies was gone for good, Ballesteros implemented a series of reforms, which streamlined the machinery of taxation, introduced a series of new taxes and attempted to reduce the national debt.

For all its reputation for obscurantist reaction, in short, Fernando's government was moving in the direction of political modernization. The result was conspiracy and rebellion. With much of the countryside in as great a state of misery as ever, it was relatively easy for the *apostólicos* to gain a following, and all the more so in those areas where they had managed to put down firm roots during the *trienio*. Thus, in Catalonia the spring of 1827 saw the outbreak of wholesale rebellion in the south. Despite attempts to stir up rebellion elsewhere, however, the insurgents gained little support, whilst they had little chance of seizing such strongholds as Tarragona or Barcelona. As a result the dispatch of fresh troops soon restored order. Nevertheless, *apostólico* discontent continued to smoulder unabated, whilst it also began to spread to other parts of the country: by 1830, for example, thanks to a series of bad harvests, a plague of grasshoppers, and a serious earthquake, the southern Levante had been particularly radicalized.

*Apostólico* unrest was strong in this latter region for other reasons. In 1823, the garrison of Alicante had incurred much hatred, whilst from 1823 onwards the Levante once again found itself exposed to the vagaries of liberalism in arms. Though often bitterly divided and at odds with one another, the many liberals who had fled to England had immediately thrown themselves into a series of attempts at invasion. The result, however, was disaster. Landing after landing was scattered without producing the slightest sign of the general rising of which the conspirators dreamed. The last gasp came on 2 December 1831 when José María Torrijos disembarked at Fuengirola with sixty men, only to be captured and executed.

Despite this record of failure, change was still on the way. The *apostólico* revolt, the liberal raids, and a foolhardy attempt to invade Mexico in 1829, had combined with the imperfect success of Ballesteros' reforms to provoke a major financial crisis. Concessions to the Carlists, as we may now begin to call them, therefore being out of the question, Fernando therefore had to make some provision for the future. His third wife having recently died, he now took a fourth in the person of his own niece, María Cristina of Naples, and, when she became pregnant, this effectively excluded Carlos from the succession altogether. Needless to say, the result was uproar. Basing their argument on a variety of points of which most important was that, as the baby was a girl – Isabel – it could not inherit the throne, they sought desperately to have Carlos reinstated, whilst at the same time building up a strong party in the army and the court. For a brief moment in September 1832 it seemed that they might

have succeeded, but in the event the cause of Isabel prevailed, the 'events of La Granja', as this crisis became known, making civil war all but inevitable.

To secure their ascendancy, the so-called *isabelinos* knew that they needed the support of the generals who had backed Fernando against the *apostólicos*, not to mention the enlightened reformers who had provided the mainstay of his regime, a mildly reformist government therefore being formed under the leadership of Francisco Cea Bermúdez. Meanwhile, Carlos was banished to Portugal; the universities, which had been closed in the course of the troubles of 1830, reopened; the liberals amnestied; the army purged; and the *Voluntarios Reales* almost entirely disbanded. Meanwhile, particularly in the military, the new government also made much use of patronage to cement its rule, finding employment for deserving officers, rehabilitating generals who had previously fallen from favour, and showering titles, decorations and promotions on all and sundry.

None of this amounted in any sense to a liberal revolution: Cea and his fellow ministers were opposed to the idea of a constitution on pragmatic grounds, whilst María Cristina was an outright absolutist who was deeply jealous of her position as regent (Fernando was now very ill, eventually succumbing on 29 September 1833). All this mattered not a jot, however, for around Spain the period 1832–3 was marked by the outbreak of a new civil war that was to overwhelm the forces of reaction, and with them the whole *antiguo regimen*.

### *The Outbreak of War*

Though undoubtedly a complex phenomenon, Carlism is not one that is open to much debate. Whilst conservative Spanish historians continue to claim that the rebels of 1833 were above all motivated by a determination to maintain the rights of Don Carlos and the Catholic Church, such arguments are unconvincing. Amongst leaders, and rank and file alike, support for Don Carlos was primarily a protest against social and economic change.

Let us look first of all at Spain's elites. In so far as these were concerned, there were numerous groups that had every reason to fear the re-emergence of reform. Though few bishops supported the rebellion, the Church's finances were so weak that the prospect of further disamortization could only cause serious alarm. For many sections of the propertied classes, whether noble or otherwise, meanwhile, a move in the direction of liberalism was equally worrying. Let us take, for example, the *foreros* of Galicia. Essentially the tenants of the great magnates and religious foundations that owned the land, the *foreros* paid very low rents and had

hitherto enjoyed both *de facto* security of tenure and the right to sublet their holdings to unlimited numbers of tenants on whatever terms they chose. For such men, liberalism – and, above all, disamortization – represented a serious threat for it would not only require them to buy their holdings, but also to stave off outside competition – hence the fact that Galicia had been notorious as a hotbed of reaction from the War of Independence onwards. In the same way, in Navarre and the Basque provinces at stake were the *fueros*, the many notables who had in one way or another profited from them therefore being strongly Carlist. And, last but not least, throughout Spain the nobility were under threat, the great danger being that the abolition of *señorialismo* might be settled in their disfavour.

Whilst the participation of landed, propertied or educated elites in the Carlist insurrection was of very considerable importance, the heart of Carlism was always the support that it could count upon amongst the lower classes. Already oppressed enough, the *populacho* had since the late eighteenth century been assailed by soaring taxation, crop failure, deindustrialization, natural disaster, epidemic, invasion, conscription, and a series of blatantly discriminatory agrarian reforms. In many regions of Spain, meanwhile, this general crisis was exacerbated by more local issues such as over-population, de-forestation, the erosion of the commons, or the transition to a market economy. Having already exploded thrice, these tensions were now exploited by Carlist agitators who whipped up the same sort of millenarian hopes occasioned by the overthrow of Godoy. What we see is therefore not the legitimist crusade of legend, but rather a massive revolt against pauperization, considerable elements of the lower classes finding in the Carlist cause both leadership and succour.

This is not to say, however, that images of the ‘real’ people of Spain rising up to fight godless liberalism and freemasonry can be accepted: in Orihuela, for example, the Carlist sympathies of the populace did not prevent it from engaging in a general refusal to pay its tithes. Had the situation been otherwise, the Carlism might have won the war, but as it was they were faced by insuperable difficulties. In Navarre and the Basque provinces, the backing of traditional elites, the existence of both alternative organs of government and significant stockpiles of arms (for the area was not only self-governing, but also supposed to provide for its own defence), inspired leadership, and, above all, the comparative absence of regular troops, allowed the establishment of a substantial army that was able to bottle the *crístinos* up in such strongholds as Bilbao and Pamplona. Elsewhere, however, the revolt never amounted to more than a guerrilla war. Harried unmercifully though the *crístinos* were, only Catalonia and Aragón saw the establishment of other bastions, the

Basques and Navarrese being unable to launch the sort of general offensive that was the only hope of winning the war whilst *crístico* garrisons continued to hold out in their very midst. As these could not be expunged, the war became a stalemate.

*Towards a New Spain*

This very stalemate would prove decisive in the history of Spain, for the inability of the *crísticos* to win a quick victory brought with it the definitive triumph of Spanish liberalism. In large part the transformation which now occurred can be interpreted in terms of traditional rivalries in the corridors of power. Being a bureaucrat in the Caroline tradition, Cea Bermúdez disliked the manner in which the army had come to occupy a central role in the governance of Spain, and in consequence wanted to remedy the many weaknesses that had allowed this to happen. In a number of areas reform was therefore accelerated. On 30 November 1833, for example, Spain was finally divided into her current system of provinces, whilst a new Ministry of Economic Development was created whose officials assumed many tasks that had hitherto been handled by the Captain Generalcies. In proceeding in this fashion, however, Cea could not but antagonize the leading generals. Unable to retain the confidence of the queen as a result, in January 1834 Cea was forced to resign, being replaced by the erstwhile *doceañista*, Francisco Martínez de la Rosa.

Important though offended military vanity may have been in the fall of Cea, it was certainly not the only issue at stake. Even the generals believed that a real measure of political change was necessary to avoid a liberal revolution, whilst many civilian officials were only too well aware that Spain's financial problems were such that the only hope lay in liberal reform. Last but not least, liberals of all sorts were naturally restive, as were merchants, bankers and the cotton manufacturers of Barcelona, whilst many even of the court aristocracy were sufficiently alarmed by the threat of peasant revolution to favour anything that promised a quick end to the war.

In this manner, then, the winter of 1833–4 witnessed the emergence of an unlikely coalition in support of some move in the direction of constitutionalism, the likelihood of which was increased by the fact that Cea had been forced to re-establish the militia, albeit in a form in which recruitment was limited strictly to men of property and education. Unable to delay matters any further, Martínez de la Rosa therefore offered Spain a 'royal statute' (the Estatuto Real) modelled very much on the French *charte* of 1814. In brief, this established a two-chamber assembly with the power to petition the throne and approve legislation.

All archbishops, bishops, grandees of Spain and *titulados* of Castile were automatically members of the upper chamber whilst their ranks were augmented by an unlimited number of royal appointees drawn from prominent figures with an annual income of at least 60,000 *reales*. Little more democratic was the lower chamber, which was elected by all men over thirty years of age who possessed an annual income of at least 12,000 *reales*.

Whatever the regime may have hoped, the Estatuto Real had no chance of survival. In the first place, it was accompanied by a wide range of other measures – greater press freedom, an amnesty that allowed even the most radical *exaltados* to return home, and an ever greater relaxation in the recruitment to the militia – that encouraged the re-emergence of radicalism as a political force. In the second, the woeful performance of the army produced demands for a less conservative policy. And in the third the arrival of the first of the great cholera epidemics which assailed nineteenth-century Europe led to serious social disorder. From the moment that the new *cortes* opened on 25 July 1834, the lower chamber therefore adopted a posture that was as aggressive as it was critical. As a result, the government was quickly forced on to the defensive, and this despite its decision to send an army to aid the constitutionalist side in the quasi-Carlist civil war that had broken out in Portugal in 1832.

As 1834 wore on into 1835, the government did secure one victory of great significance. The Estatuto Real had said nothing about local government, and the old *ayuntamientos* had therefore continued to function. Realizing that reform would alienate many of his natural supporters, Martínez de la Rosa for a long time evaded the issue. Finally pressurized into taking action, he managed to outmanoeuvre the radicals by asking for a vote of confidence that would permit the government to legislate on the issue by decree. Unable to oppose such a move, the *progresistas* – the heirs of the *exaltados* – were therefore forced to stand by whilst Martínez de la Rosa settled matters to the benefit of *moderantismo*. The result was the decree of 23 July 1835, this abolishing the *regidores perpetuos* and opening all seats to election, whilst at the same time imposing strict limits on both the franchise and the right to stand for election, making the vote obligatory, written and public, and subjecting *ayuntamientos* to a greater level of state control. As an instrument of revolutionary change, in short, the *ayuntamientos* were largely nullified.

Despite this success, Martínez de la Rosa had by now completely lost the confidence of María Cristina, and on 6 June 1835 he was forced to resign. His replacement was the Conde de Toreno, a one-time radical who had long since been won over to *moderantismo*. This change only made things worse, however, for Toreno appeared a mere creature of the palace. With the cholera epidemic still raging and parts of the country

gripped by further natural disasters, the new municipal law came as the last straw, and all the more so as the elites whose position it guaranteed proceeded to exploit it to the full. The beginning of the year had already witnessed an abortive attempt at an *exaltado* coup in Madrid, whilst serious radical disturbances had taken place in Málaga, Zaragoza, Murcia and Huesca. However, unrest now became revolution, July being marked by full-scale popular revolts in Zaragoza and Barcelona. In both instances many priests and religious were killed, but in Barcelona a new element entered the fray, the numerous cotton workers also turning their attention to the large-scale factories that had recently begun to wreak havoc with the traditional putting-out system. Led by the militia, meanwhile, the insurrection spread to Madrid and other cities. Events varied from place to place, but common elements included the proclamation of the constitution of 1812, the massacre of Carlist prisoners, anti-clerical riots, the formation of revolutionary juntas, and demands for a more active prosecution of the war and the suppression of the monasteries.

Faced by this situation, Toreno was helpless. Though he succeeded in facing down the revolt in Madrid, by the beginning of September it was clear that many even of his closest collaborators were advocating some form of compromise. Chief amongst these conciliators was Riego's ally, Juan Alvarez Mendizábal, who had just added to the laurels of 1820 by providing financial assistance to the liberal side in the Portuguese civil war. Extremely unwillingly, on 13 September 1835 Toreno therefore resigned. Firmly opposed to any move towards radicalism, the queen at first attempted to retain his services, but Mendizábal was rapidly assuming the role of the only man who could bring the crisis under control, and on 15 September María Cristina agreed that he should become prime minister.

With the appointment of Mendizábal, Spain had in theory come to be ruled by the *exaltados*. Despite the concerns of María Cristina, in some respects this mattered very little. Their leaders were becoming more and more conservative, and they certainly had no intention of restoring the constitution of 1812, seeking rather merely to amend the Estatuto Real whilst effectively buying off the popular revolution that had brought them to power (hence Mendizábal's flattery of the militia and co-option of the revolutionary leadership). Yet, for all that, radical change remained on the agenda, the dynamic and experienced Mendizábal being convinced that only this could win the war: otherwise there would be neither men nor money but only endless disorder.

In the short term, however, the priority was simply to intensify the struggle, in which respect Mendizábal was helped by sheer good fortune. Thus, Britain, France, Spain and Portugal having since April 1834 been united in the pro-liberal Quadruple Alliance, there now arrived sub-

stantial forces of British and Portuguese volunteers who had been raised specifically for service in Spain, together with a contingent of the French Foreign Legion. With his credit much reinforced, the new prime minister was able to increase the pressure still further. The *quinta* had been in annual operation in Spain since 1830, but only 20,000–25,000 men had been called up each year. Determined to gain more men, on 23 October Mendizábal ordered the call-up of 100,000 men. Sustaining such forces was a considerable problem, but here, too, Mendizábal displayed considerable virtuosity, the national debt being secretly reorganized so as to reduce the amount of interest which the government had hitherto been funding. Meanwhile, conscription itself was made a source of revenue, Mendizábal abandoning the egalitarianism of 1812 in favour of a system of redemption that in a few months had brought in no fewer than 46,000,000 *reales*.

As a result of all this, by the time that the *cortes* reopened on 16 November, the situation was much more stable. However, Mendizábal was by no means finished. Spain being burdened by debt, the prime minister resolved to despoil the Church of all that remained of its landed property, to which end he demanded a vote of confidence giving him the authority to rule by decree. This he obtained without difficulty, the *moderados* having been so shaken by the events of the summer that they were prepared to accept almost anything. Thus it was that Spain embarked upon the consummation of the liberal revolution. In reality, this was already underway, the Cea Bermúdez, Martínez de la Rosa and Toreno governments having issued a series of decrees that legalized all previous purchases of ecclesiastical and municipal property, suppressed the Jesuits, and closed a large number of religious houses, whilst many other *conventos* had been suppressed in the course of the fighting or the risings of July–August 1835. What Mendizábal now did went far beyond anything that had gone before, however, for by a series of fresh decrees culminating in that of 8 March 1836 he ordered the suppression of all but a tiny handful of the male religious orders and the expropriation and sale of their property.

The impact of this definitive wave of ecclesiastical disamortization was mixed. It has often been claimed that the land was valued too cheaply, that the desperate need to raise money led to the acceptance of bids that were far too low, and that the titles to the national debt that were offered in payment were accepted at full value, however depreciated. However, much of this has now been shown to be unfair: though the problem of depreciated bonds remains (only 11 per cent of the 4,500,000,000 *reales* involved was paid in cash), the land was valued at the going rate and sold at prices that were generally considerably higher. More to the point are the facts that payment was authorized over a period of several years, that

the war went on longer than Mendizábal had expected, and that the expenditure which the whole process generated was enormous, whether as the result of the immense bureaucracy which it created or the pensions which had to be paid to the clergy who were thereby secularized. At all events, the results were the same in that the process was of far less financial benefit than had been expected. In social terms, meanwhile, the exercise proved a disaster. As a doctrinaire liberal, Mendizábal was utterly opposed to any notion of government intervention in the defence of social justice, and would therefore have rebuffed radical pleas that the land be rented or sold off in small lots even had they not clashed with the obvious financial imperatives. As the land was generally sold off in accordance with its normal usage, there were plenty of areas where the lots were relatively small, but, even so, the result was inevitable: in town and countryside alike the bulk of the spoils went to a small minority of the purchasers.

This is not the place to discuss the long-term economic effects of disamortization, if only because it was a process that took many years. As for its more immediate effects, Mendizábal's government was not in existence long enough to experience them. Although the *crístino* commander on the northern front, Luis Fernández de Córdoba, now headed an army of 120,000 men, he proved quite incapable of winning a decisive victory. Still worse, Mendizábal's policies merely added fuel to the fire, bringing the Carlists large numbers of new recruits, inflaming clerical resistance and giving rise to many outbreaks of agrarian unrest.

Hardly surprisingly, Mendizábal's failure to secure the victories that he had promised provoked fresh popular disturbances, these in turn increasing conservative concerns which had been growing apace ever since Mendizábal had received his vote of confidence. Many *moderados* were unhappy at the attack on the Church, believing that, if Britain, France and Portugal could be persuaded to intervene in force, the Carlists could be defeated without further ado. If they were prepared to let this pass, they were not prepared to tolerate the assault on their political power that now seemed to be in the making. Thus, confronted by a *cortes* in which his supporters were in a minority, Mendizábal announced his intention of framing a new electoral law. Maintaining that this would provide a more accurate guide to public opinion, he proposed to replace the system of universal, indirect suffrage that had been inherited from the *cortes* of Cádiz with one of limited, direct suffrage, and in addition to make the constituency the district rather than the province. The potential effect of this being quite clear – in effect to strengthen the urban vote and to limit seriously the power of local notables – the *moderados* stood firm, being joined in their opposition by the ambitious and unscrupulous Francisco Javier Istúriz. A sometime *exaltado* and intimate of Mendizá-

bal, Istúriz had been seduced by worldly success and was now concerned primarily to ensure that the liberal revolution drifted no further to the left. Deeply jealous of the prime minister, he had become increasingly attractive to María Cristina as a possible alternative, and by January 1836 was in close contact with the palace. Getting wind of his activities, Mendizábal realized that the game was up, and, after first abandoning his plans for electoral reform, hastily convoked new elections.

The contest that followed was without doubt 'made' by the government, the *progresistas* obtaining a sweeping victory. The *cortes* that opened its doors on 22 March 1836 was therefore a much more radical body than its predecessor. Mendizábal having always shown a strong inclination to conciliate the *moderados*, he was in consequence placed in a very difficult position. Certainly the new electoral law was now passed without difficulty, but, backed up by fresh disturbances in such cities as Barcelona, the *exaltados* began to demand such measures as the exile of a number of suspect bishops and a purge of the generals. Forced to pursue at least the latter part of this programme, Mendizábal promptly ran into problems with the palace. Already alarmed by the *progresista* victory, María Cristina was now seeking the prime minister's downfall. Had the *progresistas* remained united, the government might yet have survived, but Istúriz was now more disaffected than ever. Knowing that Istúriz would therefore have no hesitation in acting as a 'trojan horse', the queen duly rejected Mendizábal's demands for the removal of certain absolutist generals, the great *desamortizador* in consequence being left with no option but to resign.

With the fall of Mendizábal, the government was placed in the hands of Istúriz, only for the latter immediately to be defeated in a no-confidence motion. Promptly calling new elections, the new prime minister promised a revision of the Estatuto Real, in the meantime issuing a far more generous electoral law. Held in July, the fresh contest was marked by heavy government intervention and produced a chamber dominated by a combination of *isturiztas* and *moderados*. Such a situation had no chance of surviving, however. The strength of provincial radicalism had already been demonstrated by the events of the summer of 1835, and feelings were now running higher than ever. Not only was cholera continuing to rage unchecked, but the harvest had failed for two years in succession. As for the war, the army was still destitute, whilst two Carlist 'expeditions' were running amok in the *crístico* heartlands. With it by now perfectly clear that disamortization was not going to be connected with any increase in social justice, Istúriz's conduct of the elections therefore came as the last straw. An outbreak of rioting in Madrid on 19–20 July was suppressed, but on 25 July 1836 Málaga proclaimed the constitution of 1812. On 28 July Cádiz followed suit, and

by mid-August the movement had spread to Extremadura, Valencia, Murcia and Catalonia. In the midst of the turmoil Istúriz at first tried to cling on to power, but it soon became clear that large parts of the army were unwilling to fight for the regime, whilst on 12 August part of the royal guard mutinied at La Granja, whereupon María Cristina agreed to the restoration of the constitution of 1812 until such time as the *cortes* had decided upon a definitive solution.

Thus ended the revolution of 1836. Istúriz fled abroad, and a new government was formed under the presidency of the respected *doceañista*, José María Calatrava. Determined to carry through the abortive revolution of 1835, the new administration, which included Mendizábal as Minister of Development, adopted a vigorous posture. The cautious Fernández de Córdoba was replaced by General Espartero, a tough ex-ranker who had risen to prominence through the American wars; a *quinta* of 50,000 men was imposed, together with a forced loan of 200,000,000 *reales*; the provincial juntas that had headed the revolution were institutionalized as juntas of armament and defence; a pay cut was imposed on the bureaucracy; and elections were called for a constituent assembly. Meanwhile, much of the legislation of 1812–14 and 1820–3 was restored, the sale of Church property accelerated, those bishops who had joined the Carlists or otherwise absented themselves dismissed, and the tithe finally abolished. Initially, at least, all this was sufficient to reassure the radicals who had ‘made’ the revolution, but in fact they were already being betrayed. Whether veterans of the *cortes* of Cádiz, or younger men such as Joaquín María López and Salustiano Olózaga, the leaders of *progresismo* were prepared to use the urban poor and national militia to seize power, but beyond that their radicalism was tempered by a subconscious belief that the object of the revolution was ultimately to gain access to the fruits of office. At the same time, they were also mesmerized by a naive vision of revolutionary unity that led them to make great efforts to reconcile the *moderados*. Hardly revolutionary even as it was, the constitution of 1812 was therefore quickly abandoned in favour of a new document of a far more conservative cast. Thus, more power was given to the monarch, the existence of a second chamber was confirmed, universal suffrage was abolished, and the liberty of the subject made conditional upon future ‘regulation’, the new constitution finally being adopted on 17 June 1837. In social terms, too, the *progresistas* also proved remarkably circumspect. Not only was no effort made to alter the direction that disamortization was taking, but the laws of 1811 and 1823 relating to the abolition of feudalism were interpreted in a manner guaranteed to allow the *señores* the continued enjoyment of their perquisites, a most repressive attitude also being adopted with regard to law and order. All this, moreover, was hardly surprising. Thus, the *progresista*

ministers and deputies sprang from precisely the same social groups as their *moderado* opponents, whilst the constituent *cortes* of 1836 was little different in its composition from its predecessors, except, perhaps, for some diminution in the number of ecclesiastics. On the ground, meanwhile, the revolution had meant even less, dominant local families having little difficulty in maintaining their supremacy.

The betrayal of the radicals did not go unnoticed. Under the leadership of Fermín Caballero, Pascual Madoz and Mateo Ayllón, many of the younger deputies put up a spirited fight against the conciliatory attitude of Calatrava. In the provinces, meanwhile, the secret society began once again to emerge in the form of such shadowy groups as 'Los Unitarios', the relatively democratic nature of the municipal law of 1823 also allowing the *exaltados* to acquire a certain degree of influence. Nor is it any coincidence that it was at this time that the first sprouts of proto-socialism began to appear in Spain. All this was reflected in considerable tension, but no new revolts occurred, the march of conservatism therefore continuing unabated.

Indeed, so far as the radicals were concerned, the situation took a turn for the worse. An old-guard *exaltado*, Calatrava had in some senses represented a guarantee of their interests, but in August 1837 even he was swept away. Ever since the *progresistas* had returned to power, their relations with the army had become increasingly frosty. Many officers had never liked the revolution of 1836, either because they were *moderados* or because they were alarmed by the implications of the mutiny of La Granja. However, the concerns of these men soon came to be shared even by the *progresistas*' numerous partisans and clients. If the determination of the revolutionary juntas to have a say in the direction of the war was bad enough, the behaviour of the government caused outrage. Thus, the generals remained short of money and supplies, and yet they were subjected to a barrage of demands for total victory, the Minister of War, General Rodil, eventually being dismissed as a scapegoat. Such a move was foolish in the extreme, however. By no means a bad general, Rodil had used his position to further the interests of the men who had served under him in America, where he had been the mainstay of loyalist resistance in Peru. These officers – the so-called *ayacuchos* – were naturally enraged by his dismissal, and it was not long before they avenged themselves upon the government. Madrid having been threatened by a new Carlist expedition that had set off from Navarre, the *ayacucho* Espartero had been forced to march to its defence. Presented with the perfect opportunity, the general instigated a mutiny amongst his own men. Informed that the army would not fight unless the government resigned, Calatrava promptly went, and a new ministry was formed under the *moderado*, Bardají.

For the radicals there was worse to come. The constituent *cortes* having completed its labours, new elections were convoked for September 1837. These were conducted on the new restricted franchise, which gave the vote to all men over 25 who paid over 200 *reales* in direct taxation or had an annual income of over 1,500. At the same time the editor of one of the chief *moderado* newspapers, Andrés Borrego, set up a central committee to run the campaign, published a manual for party activists, publicized the names of *moderado* candidates, and established a rudimentary party organization in the provinces. As a result the *moderados* triumphed, gaining some 150 seats to the *progresistas*' ninety-seven. Radicalism, in short, was clearly in retreat.

#### *The Emergence of Praetorianism*

Significant though the elections of 1837 undoubtedly were, there yet remained the Carlist War. In some respects, the Carlist cause seemed stronger than ever: the various foreign expeditionary forces were in a state of complete dissolution; Navarre, the Basque provinces and the interior of Catalonia remained as impregnable as ever; a new liberated area had been established in southern Aragón; large parts of the country were in the grip of incessant guerrilla warfare; and the various expeditions had consistently outmarched and outfought their lumbering opponents in a series of campaigns that had taken them across the length and breadth of the Peninsula. Yet the reality was that Carlism was in a most precarious position. Thus, its forces were as incapable as ever of winning a decisive victory; its heartlands increasingly war-weary; and its leadership increasingly disunited. As 1838 wore on, moreover, so the fundamental problems facing the Carlists became ever more apparent. One by one the *partidas* of La Mancha, Old Castile, Galicia and elsewhere were hunted down and exterminated, whilst on the crucial northern front the balance was tipping ever more heavily against the exhausted Carlist forces. Convinced that the end was near, disgusted with the ineffectual Don Carlos, and hopeful that he could secure reasonable terms, on 17 February 1839 the commander-in-chief of the Carlist forces in the north, General Maroto, therefore launched a sudden coup. Summarily executing five die-hard generals, he forced the dismissal of the *apostólico* ministers who monopolized the Carlist government, and set about securing such terms as he could from the *crístinos*, these proving to be remarkably generous (the rank and file were to be allowed to return to their homes, and the officers to enlist with the *crístinos*, Espartero also agreeing to attempt to protect the *fueros*). Completely satisfied, on 29 August 1839 Maroto finally laid down his arms at Vergara. Although Don Carlos escaped to France, the end could not be

long delayed. By the summer of 1840 Espartero had crushed the remaining Carlist bastions in Aragón and Catalonia, and on 6 July the last rebel troops fled into France. The war was over.

The prominence attained by Espartero in the dying campaigns of the Carlist War was not just the fruit of military success, but also a reflection of the political situation. Despite Borrego's attempts at party organization, the *moderados* lacked the cohesion necessary to exploit their majority. As a result, it was only with some difficulty that a new government was formed under the Conde de Ofalia, whilst an attempt to waive the oath of loyalty that had to be sworn by the deputies – a reflection of the fact that a number of the *moderados* had Carlist sympathies – was blocked by the *progresistas*. Fierce opposition, too, was occasioned by the government's programme, this centring on, first, a reconciliation with the Church, and, second, the reform of local government. After extensive debate it was eventually agreed that the Church should be compensated for the loss of its land by the restoration of a portion of the tithes, but the new municipal law was another matter. In brief, the intention had been both to reduce the autonomy of local government and to limit the electorate by means of a property franchise. Realizing that these measures threatened them with political extinction – the *ayuntamientos* were, after all, their only real power base – the *progresistas* put up such a fight that the measure had to be abandoned.

By the spring of 1838, then, it was clear that neither *progresismo* nor *moderantismo* were strong enough to carry the day. In this situation, political power could not but gravitate to the one force that had the ability to tip the balance. This was, of course, the army, and, in particular, the figure of the *caudillo* – the general-cum-saviour who could either make and unmake governments at will or head the administration himself, whilst at the same time using his power to ensure that he never lacked for a powerbase in the officer corps. In this respect, everything now revolved around the figure of Baldomero Espartero, the reality of the situation soon being made all too clear. Thus, desperate to reduce the general's influence, which was all the more intolerable because of his growing association with *progresismo* – intensely vain as he was, Espartero revelled in popular adulation and was much inclined to court the urban crowd – Ofalia decided to remove him from command. The events that followed are too arcane to enter into here in any depth, but in brief September 1838 saw the fall not of Espartero but the government. A certain amount of jealousy amongst the rest of the *generalato* notwithstanding, Espartero was left as the effective arbiter of Spanish politics. Thus he was able to impose a cabinet headed of his own making headed by, first, the Duque de Frias, and, second, the *veintista* prime minister, Evaristo Pérez de Castro, while at the same time extending his control

over the army through ensuring the advancement of his numerous henchmen.

It will be noted here that Espartero made no attempt to establish a *progresista* government. Whilst counting many veterans of *exaltado* revolts amongst his allies, the general was a man of order who was deeply loyal to María Cristina. Much interested in winning the war, he also disliked the *progresistas*' anti-militarism. Indeed, when the new *cortes* elected in the fresh general elections held in the summer of 1839 showed signs of being overly susceptible to *progresista* influence, he forced its dissolution, heavy government pressure ensuring that the chamber that was elected in its place was firmly dominated by the *moderados*. In acting in this fashion, however, Espartero found that he had gone too far. Believing, perhaps, that the general was in their pocket, the *moderados* announced that they intended to force through not only Ofalia's municipal law, but also a variety of other measures including a new press law, a reduction in the franchise, and a bill to re-establish a council of state. Overawing the *progresistas* by the threat of force, they were also persuaded by Espartero's deadly rival, General Narváez, to set about restricting the influence of the *ayacuchos*.

The *dénouement* was not long in coming. No sooner had the *cortes* passed the new municipal law on 4 June 1840, than the *progresistas* erupted in a storm of protest. Fearing a fresh rebellion, María Cristina promptly travelled to Espartero's headquarters in Catalonia – at this stage, of course, the general was supervising the last stages of the Carlist war – in the hope that she could win him over. In this, however, she had miscalculated, for, though no lover of *progresismo*, Espartero was concerned at the impact that counter-revolution would have on his own popularity. At the same time, meanwhile, he was all too well aware that Narváez was bitterly jealous of his glory (as *crístico* commander in the south the latter had been denied the opportunity of major victory). Far from supporting the queen, Espartero therefore placed himself at the head of the revolt that her actions had immediately precipitated in Barcelona. Determined to defeat *progresismo* once and for all – she was, of course, wholly in approval of the *moderados* – the queen fled to Valencia in the hope of rallying support. By now, however, all Spain was on the brink of revolt, whilst the government had resigned in despair. On 1 September the *progresistas* who controlled the *ayuntamiento* and militia of Madrid proclaimed the capital to be in a state of rebellion. Within a week this example had been followed by many other cities, including not only such veterans of revolution as Cádiz and Málaga, but also many of the far more tranquil cities of Old Castile. At Valencia, the Captain General, Leopoldo O'Donnell, remained loyal, but the vast majority of the generals agreed to swear allegiance to the provisional

government that had by now been proclaimed in Madrid, the fact being that few officers were prepared to risk opposing Espartero. Recognizing the inevitable, María Cristina now agreed to the formation of a new government under Espartero, and took ship for Marseilles, leaving behind her the eleven-year old Isabel II in the care of Espartero as *ministro-regente*.

### *The Regency of Espartero*

What, then, had occurred between 1837 and 1840? One development of prime importance was that the Spanish army had been drawn into politics more overtly than ever before. Apologists for the military tradition have always tried to argue that this situation came about through the weakness of the politicians. Within limits these arguments can be seen to have some foundation, for the vagaries of Spanish politics left politicians of all persuasions no option but to appeal to one faction or another of the officer corps. However, this is hardly the end of the story. At least as important were the ambitions and rivalries of the generals themselves, the latter being all too eager to establish friendly relations with the politicians. But, above all, the generals needed governments that could govern, Espartero's views in large part being the fruit of a belief that the *moderados* could not maintain their position in the face of the pressure for change building up amongst rank-and-file *progresistas*. Hand in hand with all this, of course, went a preoccupation with order that was to become all-consuming, revolution being associated with indisciplined militias, supply failures, attacks on the generals, and visionary notions of people's war.

At all events, Spain was now ruled by a *caudillo*. However, Espartero was not a dictator: *moderados* and republicans alike – 1840 had seen the emergence of the first small republican groups – were allowed a reasonable degree of freedom of operation, whilst the structure of government remained unchanged. What is the case, however, is that it was the *progresistas* who were now in control. For the latter the revolution of 1840 had in theory represented a great triumph, but in practice the regency of Espartero was to prove a disaster, the story of the next three years being that of the disintegration of *progresismo*. The first problem that emerged was the nature of the government and regency. Headed by Joaquín María López and Fermín Caballero, the radical wing of the *progresistas* had envisaged that the task of government would be taken over by a central junta drawn from the various provincial juntas that had emerged in the course of the revolution, and further that the regency should henceforth be composed of at least three people. However, neither aim was achieved. The central junta was effectively prevented from

meeting, whilst the new *cortes* that met after the fresh elections held in February 1841 rejected every attempt to secure a council of regency, *progresista* moderates such as Olózaga having absolutely no intention of alienating Espartero. Still worse, the government was remodelled by Espartero in such a manner that not a single important *progresista* was included; a modified version of the municipal law of 1840 was introduced; and the hated monopolies on salt and tobacco were retained, these having been farmed out to the rich financiers whose support was the key to financial survival. Equally, if sales of Church land were speeded up, the efforts of such radicals as Spain's first ever republican deputies, Manuel García Uzal and Pedro Méndez Vigo, to secure some protection for the poor were swept aside, far too many of the *progresista* leaders having an interest in the system prevailing hitherto for them to have any chance of success.

If the *progresistas* were deeply divided, the radicals' disgruntlement did not immediately translate into open opposition. On the contrary, when María Cristina in October 1841 launched a bid to overthrow Espartero, the radicals rallied to the defence of the regime, forming local 'commissions of public vigilance' and taking an enthusiastic part in the mobilization of the militia. How far their actions were important is another matter, for the coup proved distinctly unimpressive. At all events, Espartero does not seem to have been impressed, for as soon as the danger was over he ordered the suppression of the vigilance commissions. This, however, only served to provoke further trouble, especially in Barcelona, where the local commission had won much approval by imposing heavy levies on many prominent members of the bourgeoisie (it should be noted that the *ciudad condal* had recently witnessed the formation of Spain's first trade unions). Refusing to dissolve itself, the commission defiantly set about the demolition of the great citadel that dominated the city, only for Espartero to move in and dissolve both junta and trade unions.

Thanks in large part to the struggle that now broke out over the question of free trade, the general air of division and crisis now grew still worse. Spain's coastline was so long, and her badly paid customs guard so easy to bribe, that she was especially vulnerable to smuggling, much of it British. The need to do something to remedy the situation having become essential, in 1840 Espartero had set up a commission of enquiry. Voted through by the *cortes* in July 1841, the scheme that this proposed did not win universal approval, for there were numerous interests which it threatened. That said, there was no reason why the storm should not ultimately have blown itself out had not an innocuous remark in the British parliament given rise to a rumour that Spain was to be opened to unrestricted free trade. The cotton industry being in the grip of a severe

depression, November 1842 therefore witnessed a furious rebellion in Barcelona. Retribution being swift and brutal – the city was subjected to indiscriminate bombardment – the regent's credit with the *progresista* left was completely exhausted.

If urban radicalism had now been driven into a position of outright hostility to Espartero, the unity of the *progresistas* had been irrevocably broken. However, the regent had not been able either to assuage the hostility of the *moderados* or to retain his hold on moderate *progresismo*, many of whose leaders had been inveigled into a *de facto* alliance with their erstwhile opponents. Nor was the situation much better within the army. Although the *ayacuchos* were loyal, Narváez had been secretly plotting against the regency, whilst many officers were deeply resentful of their continued economic problems, the manner in which Espartero openly favoured his former American comrades, and the various measures of demobilization that had followed the end of the war. Conscious of his growing isolation, the regent dissolved the *cortes* and called fresh elections in April 1843, but so eroded was his prestige that the best efforts of the administration to pack the chamber with his supporters produced no more than seventy deputies.

Faced by a situation that was near impossible, the general at first sought a way out by forming a radical ministry under López in the cynical hope that whilst this would satisfy the left, the new prime minister's extremist rhetoric would be tempered by the fruits of office. However, prime minister and regent soon fell out, whereupon López promptly resigned. Unable to find a replacement, Espartero called new elections, only to find that even the centrist *progresistas* would no longer back him, instead joining with both right and left of the party to call for rebellion, whilst at the same time inviting the *moderado* diaspora to intervene in defence of constitutional liberty (since the autumn of 1841 Espartero had been becoming more and more repressive, restricting the freedom of the press and arresting a wide range of dissidents).

Watching from afar, María Cristina and her supporters needed no further urging, Narváez and several other generals sailing to Valencia, where fear of lower-class unrest quickly persuaded the *ayacucho* Captain General to throw in his lot with the rebellion. Even before Narváez had landed on 27 June, meanwhile, military rebellions had taken place in Málaga, Alicante, Seville, Granada, Teruel, Reus, Barcelona and Zaragoza. Sufficient of the *ayacuchos* remained loyal for the direct roads to Madrid from the east and south blocked by loyal troops, but Narváez nevertheless managed to get a small column of troops to the outskirts of the capital. For a while he was checked by the local militia, for whom in the last resort fear of *moderantismo* seems to have outweighed disillusionment with Espartero, and enough time was gained for the arrival

of a relief force. On 22 July, however, Narváez won a crucial victory at Torrejón de Ardoz, whereupon Madrid had no option but to surrender. Realizing that all was lost, Espartero fled to Cádiz, where he got aboard a British warship, leaving behind him a Spain that had simply exchanged one *caudillo* for another.

### *The Die is Cast*

Curiously enough, the fall of Espartero did not lead to the immediate formation of a *moderado* cabinet, Narváez rather bringing back López. However, in reality the latter was little more than a cypher kept on to placate the *progresistas*. Real power was exercised by Narváez who proceeded to force the government to purge the *ayacuchos*, dismiss numerous *diputaciones provinciales* and *ayuntamientos*, surround the Princess Isabel with conservative councillors, and order the dissolution of the militia. The only resistance came from the rank and file of *progresismo*, which took to the streets yet again in Zaragoza, Segovia, Badajoz, Seville, Córdoba, Almería, and Barcelona. Meanwhile, a number of terrorist incidents took place in Madrid, in one of which Narváez narrowly escaped death. Significantly, however, the rebellion failed. In contrast to what had happened in 1840 and 1843, most officers stayed loyal, Narváez's violent anti-radicalism naturally being attractive to men who had for years been subject to a barrage of threat, insubordination and insult. Faced by soldiers who shot them down without mercy, the radical mobs for the most part simply dissolved, and, if they secured control of Barcelona, it was only because this was the only city in Spain where the garrison went over to them. Fight bravely enough though Barcelona did – the city held out for two months under intense bombardment – the fact was that radicalism simply lacked the fighting power necessary to prevail.

Well aware that he was being rendered irrelevant, López was eventually driven to make a stand, only to find himself betrayed by his own supporters, most leading *progresistas* being above all opportunists who had little desire to challenge the social and political order and had over and over again shown themselves to be willing to compromise on matters of principle. Since the early autumn, the right wing of the party had been collaborating with Narváez in plans for the formation of a new ministry from which López and his supporters would be excluded, and, when the prime minister responded to *moderado* aggression in the new *cortes* elected in the course of the autumn by ordering the restoration of the militia and the convocation of fresh municipal elections, it refused point-blank to support him. Thus betrayed, López resigned, his place being taken by Salustiano Olózaga. Without doubt, the latter was perceived by

Narváez as a 'useful fool', but in this they had misjudged him. Whilst more conservative than López, Olózaga had primarily been driven by a determination to seize office for himself, and, to the astonishment of his some-time allies, not only refused to appoint any *moderado* ministers, but also secured a new dissolution of the *cortes*. What Olózaga believed he could achieve by this is unclear, but such independence was nevertheless utterly unacceptable. In consequence, Isabel II (who was now formally queen of Spain, having been proclaimed of age – at the age of thirteen – by the *moderados* on 8 November) was prevailed upon by Narváez to rescind the decree of dissolution, an utterly mendacious story being put about to the effect that Olózaga had secured this by force. Had the *progresistas* stood firm, they might have yet have survived, but once again they played straight into the hands of their opponents. Having overthrown López to secure his own advancement, Olózaga now found himself sold in his turn. If he controlled one of the major factions within the party, another had grown up around the equally ambitious and opportunistic Luis González Bravo. Realizing that Narváez was very much the man of the moment, Bravo decided that the general was his best prospect, and in consequence offered the *moderados* the support of his fifty-odd deputies. Completely out-manoeuvred, on 1 December 1843 Olózaga resigned, leaving Bravo to form a new ministry (at this stage it suited Narváez and the *moderados* to remain in the background, the last thing that they wanted being to risk uniting all the *progresistas* against them).

The downfall of Olózaga was not quite the end of *progresista* government, González Bravo remaining in power until 2 May 1844. However, for all practical purposes it marked the end of twenty years of turmoil. Superficially, the most important change that had resulted from innumerable risings, coups and civil wars was Spain's emergence as a liberal state, but this had long since been a foregone conclusion. The vital issue was not whether Spain would turn to liberalism, but rather the form in which it would do so. From 1820 onwards, Spanish liberalism had been deeply divided. Violent though the conflicts that resulted from this division undoubtedly were, there was at heart little disagreement as to the form that the new Spain should actually take. For Martínez de la Rosa as much as Riego, for Toreno as much as Mendizábal, and for Narváez as much as Espartero, the ideal was a Spain that would be dominated by the oligarchy that had in fact already dominated her since the early eighteenth century. Social change was not an issue, still less democracy, the object being rather to re-order Spain in such a manner as, first, to take account of the financial and economic realities which she faced, and, second, to allow the *pudientes* to maintain their position, if not to improve upon it. In order to secure these aims, most of the factions into

which the liberal world was divided were prepared to call upon the *populacho* as demonstrators, rioters or members of the national militia, just as *serviles*, *apostólicos*, *agraviados*, and Carlists had been prepared to call it forth as rioters, guerrillas or *requetés*. Once nirvana had been attained, however, the *populacho* were superfluous to requirements, the chief goal thereafter being the restoration of order.

The *populacho*, however, were not mere pawns to be moved around at the whim of one faction or other of the elite. If they proved easy to mobilize, it was because they were suffering a veritable holocaust. War, epidemic, natural disaster, harvest failure, economic change, overpopulation, fiscal pressure, and rack-renting combined to flay the populace to the bone, in the meantime precipitating a social conflict that formed a constant backdrop to the evolution of national politics. Recognizing this, a handful of the political elite came gradually to the conclusion that the future of Spanish constitutionalism could not be secured unless political and social emancipation went hand in hand, pressure therefore mounting for such measures as greater equity in the implementation of disamortization. Themselves often drawn from marginal elements, they increasingly moved outside the scope of mainstream politics, through successive secret societies becoming the champions of a democratic, and, ultimately, republican, tradition that repeatedly sought to hijack the political process, but was in practice never able to do so.

What was at issue in the period 1823–43, then, was not so much a clash between constitutionalism and absolutism, as between liberalism and, as it were, ‘liberalism with a human face’. Notwithstanding romantic marxian dreams of ‘the people’ being the decisive force in the revolution, in this latter conflict there could be but one winner, Spain as a result being burdened with a social structure that perpetuated the crisis of the early nineteenth century. If Spain had in 1823 been facing the ‘ominous decade’, she was now facing the ‘ominous century’.