

I

Historical background

The Catalans in their own countries (Catalonia, Valencia) and the Balears in the Spanish State, Roussillon in France (population over 7 millions) are not a linguistic minority. They are a nation, once independent, now attached to the Spanish State by wars of conquest and military force.

A number of illiterate and poor labourers from the South of Spain have settled in Catalonia in recent years. This immigration, though originally due to the higher economic level in Catalonia, has been particularly encouraged during the last 30 years by General Franco's government as part of their policy to assimilate the Catalans to Castile. These recently arrived Spanish-speaking immigrants, however, do not constitute a Spanish national minority in Catalonia. They have neither made Catalonia a bilingual nation. They are only economic immigrants, like the Spanish workers who during recent years have settled in France, Belgium, Switzerland and Germany and which, obviously, do not form Spanish national minorities in these countries. These immigrants in Catalonia usually assimilate themselves into the native population and at the second generation they all speak Catalan.

The language.

Catalan is one of the eight main Latin languages. It is closely associated with Occitan (langue d'Oc or Provençal) spoken in the South of France. Philologists say that, while all Latin languages are sisters, Catalan and Occitan form a pair of twins, while Spanish (or Castilian) and Portuguese form another.

Isolated Catalan words begin to appear among the Latin text of documents written in the 10th century. In those of the 11th full Catalan phrases are already to be found. A long poem, the Canço de Santa Fe, composed probably in the Pyrenees about 1033-1066, is written in a language which philologists have not yet decided whether it is Catalan or Occitan - so close was at that time the resemblance between both languages. Later historical events leading to an independent evolution of Catalonia brought with it the formation of a definite and separate Catalan language. A collection of sermons, Homilies d'Organya, of the late 12th century is written in a language unquestionably Catalan.

In the flourishing literature of the 13th century, Ramon Lull wrote in Catalan the first novel (Blanquerna, 1283) and the first philosophical treatise (Libre de Contemplacio de Den, 1285) ever written in any Romance language.

During the Middle Ages Catalonia expanded to the Balears, Valencia, Sicily, Greece, Sardinia and Naples. A small empire, economically based on maritime trade and constitutionally on democratic representative institutions, local self-government and federation, was thus formed in the Mediterranean. The Counts of Barcelona, who acquired the title of Kings of Aragon, ruled upon it.

Catalan was the language of the royal court and of the administration. It was also the language of a remarkable literature comprising not only poems, novels, chronicles and dramas, but also treatises on philosophy, religion and law, on natural sciences, medicine, astronomy etc. A peculiar richness of Catalan literature is a large number of political speeches delivered in the Corts or Parliament - a fact that bears witness of the vigour of this democratic institution. (Apart from that of Iceland, the Catalan Corts are the oldest Parliament on Continental Europe. Their first session was in 1214).

II

Union with Castile

The Royal House of Barcelona was extinguished in 1410. A Castilian prince was elected as sovereign of Catalan Confederation. In 1469 the young heir Ferdinand married Isabella, the heiress to the Crown of Castile. The peninsular states were united under a common ruler by the Emperor Charles V (1515), but each preserved its independence, laws, organisation, Parliament and Government. This was the Confederal structure under the House of Austria during the 16th and 17th century.

Political decadence during this period brought with itself a decadence of Catalan literature. The Catalan people, however, continued the exclusive use of their own language. Castilian was used only by some aristocratic families who had intermarried with families of the Castilian aristocracy, and by Castilian members of religious orders established in Catalonia.

End of independence.

The war of the Spanish Luccession, at the beginning of the 18th century, brought the end of the Catalan independent state. The Catalan countries feared that the French Pretender Philip d'Anjou, the grand-son of Louis XIV, would abolish their freedom. So they supported the Austrian Pretender, who failed to succeed.

The Treaty of Utrecht imposed the laws of Castile upon Catalonia. So, the Catalans continued the war alone against France and Spain. Barcelona resisted during fourteen months the siege by a Franco-Spanish army and continuous shelling. At the final assault all the population fought during two days and the city had to be taken street by street (September 11, 1714).

Two years later Philip V's Decree of the New Order (Nova Planta) proclaimed the King's right of military conquest and his absolute power to establish a new form of Government in Catalonia. This meant the abolition of Catalan sovereignty and independence, of all her political institutions and the annexation of Catalonia and Valencia to the Kingdom of Castile.

III

The fight against the Catalan language.

From the first moment the new Spanish authorities had in their minds the destruction of the Catalan language and the imposition of Spanish in its place. The proceedings of the Government, the "Council of Castile", published in modern times, show how their plan was to ban the Catalan language and Catalan books from the schools and to force Catalan children to learn everything, even the Christian doctrine, in Castilian. However, this was done at that time simply because it was an unrealistic plan impossible to enforce and Castilians feared reactions. The judges of the Law Courts at Majorca had to explain to the Council of Castile that it was impossible to conduct legal proceedings in Castilian for the simple reason that no one knew this language in the island. The answer of the Council was to tolerate the use of Catalan for the time being, while endeavouring at the same time to introduce Castilian quietly and by crafty methods.

It was not until 1768 that the order came from Madrid that Castilian was to be compulsory in all schools in Catalonia. Even so, it seems that for some two generations the order was not fully enforced in Catalan schools.

Paradoxially, the order produced some unexpected results. The Spanish grammars for Catalan schools of the late 18th century show, as it is natural, that the teaching of Spanish was done starting from Catalan, the students passing from this language into Spanish. The result was that the teaching of Spanish brought a revived interest in the study of Catalan grammar. This was one of the remote causes of the Catalan Revival.

IV

The Catalan revival

The causes of the Catalan Renaixensa or Revival are complex. First, the memory, never lost, of the past national history and independence, i.e. a national consciousness always alive. Then, economic development and industrialisation that brought Catalonia above agricultural Spain. Politically, liberalism. Literary and ideologically, romanticism.

The "official" date for the Renaixensa is 1833, the year of the publication of a Catalan poem, Ode to the Motherland, which had a resounding success. The theatre and the novel in Catalan followed the same line of development, and by the end of the century the modern Catalan literature had reached a period of splendour.

The Spanish Government meanwhile had continued their fight to impose the Spanish language upon the Catalans. By an order of 1856 contracts, deeds of agreement, wills and testaments had all to be written in Spanish. Another order of 1867 made compulsory in all Catalan plays that at least one character should speak Spanish. The Catalan retaliate making the villain of the play or some grotesque character to speak Spanish.

Progress in the 20th century.

The progress was consolidated in the first quarter of the 20th century. The Institut d'Estudis Catalans (founded in 1907) divided in three Sections, Philology, History and Archaeology, and Sciences, gave a definite structure to Catalan studies and research. The use of the Catalan language in the higher level of academic activities was thus securely established.

Progress was also made in the political field. The Mancomunitat de Catalunya, bringing together into a single body the four provinces into which the country had been split by the Spanish Government,

came into being in 1911. Obviously, it used Catalan as its official language and this gave a further impetus to the standing of the language. At this time the great philologist Pompeu Fabra unified the modern orthograph and grammar, thus bringing an important contribution to perfect Catalan as a language suitable for literature, philosophy and sciences.

Unfortunately, Spanish political developments came to interfere with this national and cultural progress. The dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera (1923-1930) suppressed the Mancomunitat, the Institut d'Estudis Catalans and Catalan schools, and ban the Catalan flag.

V

The Autonomy of Catalonia

The Catalan reaction against this policy of the Dictator and of King Alfonso XIII who supported him, brought the proclamation of the Catalan Republic in Barcelona by Francesc Macia (April 14, 1931), simultaneously with the Spanish Republic in Madrid. While the Catalan Republic of an Iberian Federation did not last long, a very large measure of autonomy was obtained by Catalonia. The right of self-determination was applied and the Statute of Autonomy was submitted to a referendum of the Catalan people in which 85% of the electoraters voted in favour of the Statute.

According to it the Catalans elected a Parliament of 80 members by universal suffrage, women included. The Parliament elected Sr. Francesc Macia as President of Catalonia, who, by the Constitution, was the only representative of the Spanish Republic in Catalonia. The President appointed a Government responsible to the Parliament.

So after 220 years the internal administration of Catalonia returned to Catalan hands.

Either Catalan or Spanish as official languages. The internal administration, however, was all in Catalan. Posts in the Catalan Civil Service were open to all Spaniards, but non-Catalans had to pass an examination to show that they knew the language of the country.

Education started in the maternal language of the child, either Catalan or Spanish. At the age of 10 Catalan children started to learn Spanish, and vice versa, though educationalists would have preferred the age of 12.

The University of Barcelona, until then belonging to the Spanish State, became autonomous under a Board of Patrons where, among others, there were representatives of the Catalan and the Spanish Governments. Catalan and Spanish languages and cultures had equal status, professors and students having the right to freely use either language for their academic work.

The Fourth Spanish Civil War (1936-39) brought to an end the freedom of Catalonia, her language and culture. It is not always realised outside Spain that the revolt of the Army and General Franco's regime are mainly an expression of Castilian reactionary nationalism against the peripheral nationalities of the Peninsula, the Basques, the Goliciane and the Catalans (38% of the population of the Spanish State). For almost thirty years the Spanish Government have employed the harsh methods of a totalitarian state to suppress the language, culture and national identity of the Catalans in order to assimilate them to the Castilians. It has failed.

The ideological principle of Castilian aggressive nationalism against the non-Castilian nationalities of the Peninsula is its assertion that they are "all united by a common destiny". This is no more than a translation of the Nazi doctrine of the Schicksalsgemeinschaft by which the invasion by Hitler of Germany's neighbours was "justified". Long after Nazism its doctrine is still allowed to inspire in Spain an attempt to destroy a European nation.

VI

Cultural genocide

A Decree of General Franco (1938) abolished the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia. He gave two reasons, (1) that the rising of the Army against the Republic automatically brought the abolition of all institutions contrary to the aims of the rising, and (2) the entry of his "glorious armies" (sic.) into Catalan territory. None of the two reasons has any juridical force.

Catalonia was, thereupon, divided again into four provinces, each under a governor appointed by the Madrid Government, to which "the honour was rendered" to be ruled like all the other provinces of the Spanish State.

The President of Catalonia, H.E. Lluís Companys, who went as a political exile into France, was arrested there by the Gestapo when the Nazi occupation. Handed over to Franco he was sentenced to death by a military court of Spanish generals and brought before the firing squad in Barcelona.

All laws passed by the Catalan Parliament were abrogated and decisions of the High Court of Appeal in Catalonia quashed.

The whole educational system created by the Catalan Government was suppressed. The teaching of Catalan was banned and Catalan children forced to learn Spanish only.

Barcelona University reverted to the Spanish State. The Chairs of Catalan language, Catalan literature, History of Catalonia and Catalan Civil Law were abolished and the professors dismissed. Only now, after 28 years, some attempts are being made to re-establish these studies, but only for specialised students.

The publication of books in Catalan was under total interdiction from 1939 to 1948. The ban included such works as the Catalan translation of the Bible and a collection of Greek and Latin classic authors in their original text with a Catalan translation, which had both begun to be published before the war.

The number of Catalan books allowed to be published every year has since been gradually increasing. It is over 200 now, but this figure is only one third of the number of Catalan books published one generation ago - a clear demonstration of the devastating effect of the Francoist regime and censorship on cultural progress.

There was a wholesale suppression of the Catalan press. Before the Franco regime, 24 dailies were published in Catalan, about 400 periodicals (weeklies, monthlies and quarterlies) on all subjects (news, literary, professional, political, scientific, sport etc.) and a weekly bulletin of religious news in each of the 1.000 parishes in Catalonia. None has survived.

All that exists at present is - a monthly cultural review, Serra d'Or, published at the Benedictine Abbey of Montserrat, and two monthly periodicals for children, published by Catholic organisations. All three are published under the protection offered by the Concordat with the Vatican to religious publications.

There is still another weekly in Catalan, Tele-Estel, published under the direct control of the Spanish Ministry of Information. The reason for this anomaly is that it offers an alibi to the Spanish Government. It can claim with it that Catalan periodicals are allowed and that the accusations made by Catalans before international bodies are without foundation.

VII

The Future

The policy of the Spanish Government against Catalonia pursued during 28 years amounts to a cultural genocide. What results have the Government achieved?

The answer is: NONE. Catalan continues to be spoken, written and honoured as a language of culture. More still, in Valencia the younger generation is now departing from Spanish and using Catalan as their literary language.

Though the anti-Catalan cultural genocide has totally failed, the Spanish Government refused to recognise it and continues to enforce this useless bankrupt policy. This is both wicked and stupid.

But there is something worse. As one could easily understand, this attempted genocide to destroy Catalonia has created a reaction among Catalans and dangerously embittered their relations with Spain. Catalans keep quiet for the time being, as they know by experience that violence is just what the Spanish Government would like to see. Spanish authorities in Catalonia (there are 35.000 agents of the police and other security forces in the country) know the attitude of mind of the Catalans and feel nervous because they do not know what ground their feet are treading. The Catalans keep their nerves and wait for their opportunity. Confidence in the future has never been so firm.

Released
by the

CATALAN NATIONAL COUNCIL

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Oslo, August 1967.