

# The Consolidation of the Constitutional Monarchical System (1874-1902)<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The restoration of the Bourbons with Alfonso XII in 1874 initiated in liberal Spain a new period characterised by the pact between the conservative and the progressive parties. The constitutional monarchy was consolidated with the arrival of a king, Alfonso XII, who wholeheartedly supported it (1874-1885), but above all after his death, which led to the pact between the two parties. The regency of María Cristina (1885-1902) was developed under this pact until during the end-of-century crisis and the actual reign of Alfonso XIII, it underwent a crisis, in the regent's search for new parties and policies.

Keywords: restoration, constitutional politics/policy, pact, turno (peaceful turn), King Alfonso XII, regent María Cristina

## Alfonso XII: a king trained in exile

The restoration of the Bourbons in the shape of Isabella II's son, Alfonso XII, represented the start of a new era in the history of Spanish Liberalism. Once again, after the succession of party constitutions, which led to the rupture of the 1840s, there was a quest for an agreed constitution, in the tradition of 1837<sup>2</sup>.

Alfonso XII only experienced one of the typical uprisings of our liberalism, specifically that which, in the form of revolution, exiled Isabella II from Spain in 1868. This meant that the Prince of Asturias lived abroad from the age of almost eleven shortly after his seventeenth birthday, when he was restored to the throne. Six decisive years in his personal and political upbringing; he had the opportunity to be educated in different countries, to learn their customs, their cultures, and their languages: French, German and English. He spent the first two years studying in Paris, where he quickly mastered the language, as he did with German while spending the next three years studying in Vienna, until 1874. During this period his mother abdicated in him and he inherited the crown, beginning with Cánovas and other leaders of the Restoration an intense correspondence in an attempt to direct their actions<sup>3</sup>. His last year in exile, which was interrupted when he was proclaimed King, took place in England, at Sandhurst Royal Military College, although Alfonso requested that his mother give him a university and constitutional education, 'studying and learning what Parliament is, what the Constitution is, what Government is'<sup>4</sup>.

It was this Academy that lent its name to the famous December 1 manifesto – not published in the press until the 27th – through which the Restoration project was announced. A day later it was leaked by Cánovas in a letter written by Alfonso that is a

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<sup>1</sup> Within the project *Cultura del honor, política y esfera pública en la España liberal (1833-1890)* PGC2018-093698-B-I00

<sup>2</sup> Lario (2019)

<sup>3</sup> Archivo General del Palacio Real (AP), drawer 21/14-A; box 69; Lario (1999): 45 and ff..

<sup>4</sup> Lario (2003a): 26. Letter to Isabela II in Espadas Burgos (1975): 393-394

veritable list of intentions: the search for liberal consensus based on a two-party system, indispensable for the doctrine of the age, and in the omnipresent English case<sup>5</sup>; already present was the desire to «regenerate the country» which would culminate at the end of the century after the crisis of 98; set in its time and with the necessary contextualisation, it is interesting to note that in this desire he speaks of «killing the word party» and replacing it with that of the «regeneration» of the country, in order to place Spain on a par with «the other European countries»; only then would there be a possibility of its renaissance, which he imagined would take place under his children<sup>6</sup>. Despite this, he declares that he intends to continue the tradition of constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary government, which began upon the death of Fernando VII, breaking the revolutionary tradition of the Cadiz monarchy; and insists on the practical and constitutional spirit as opposed to the Isabeline tradition, presenting himself ‘as a man of the truly liberal century’<sup>7</sup>.

### **The ‘charm’ of a constitutional king**

I have already written about the attractive nature of this king’s personality, which Doctor Gregorio Marañón described as «a native attraction», highlighting his «foresight in courageously using generosity». His intelligence and ability were said to be above average and he was enormously keen to learn. There was also no doubt as to his liberal ideas, which according to the British Ambassador ‘suggested closeness to the revolutionary parties’, and his lack of religiousness, counterbalance to his wife, the regent, as he wrote upon the death of his first wife, Mercedes<sup>8</sup>; and he appeared very much to trust in his own judgement, in spite of his youth, although he lacked affectation and was a modest type. In the aforementioned report, the result of a one-to-one meeting with the King that lasted over half an hour, the British Ambassador declared that he was superior to his counsellors and for this reason felt isolated. Similar views were expressed by the German Ambassador and Bismarck himself, as well as Sagasta and the elements of the Constitutional Party who dined in the Palace in 1875, so it was the liberal leader who was most responsible for spreading the opinions regarding ‘the quick-wittedness, verbal charm and attractive nature of the young Monarch’<sup>9</sup>.

Alfonso XII was the first Spanish king (with the exception of Amadeo) who was fully conscious of the constitutional monarchy and the need to know it in depth in order to act accordingly, which was evidenced by his purchase upon arriving in Madrid of a selection of essential works with regard to the constitutional function of the monarchy, including Constant’s *Cours de Politique constitutionnelle*, and *The English Constitution*, by William Bagehot, obligatory reading for British monarchs and their heirs<sup>10</sup>. These circumstances played a significant role in helping Cánovas initially to control the pressure exerted by the Moderates upon religious freedom; the King highlighted this at one of the first councils of ministers when he warned Elduayen, who had just voted in favour of Catholic unity, that to suppress it would not be a compromise; he also warned the Bishop

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<sup>5</sup> Lario (2003c):130

<sup>6</sup> Espadas Burgos (1975): 97

<sup>7</sup> Lario (1999): 32

<sup>8</sup> *Public Record Office. Foreign Office (PRO. FO)*, 72/1412: 25-10-1875, Layard’s report to Derby. Real Biblioteca de Palacio (RBP), *Manuscritos*, II/4051: 31-07-1878, ‘Diario de Caza de Alfonso XII’: Lario (2003a): 15, 21-22. Lario (2003b): 171-178

<sup>9</sup> Marañón (1946): XV. German reports in Beck (1979): 195-196, and Schulze (1987): II, 734 and ff. Silvela (1902): 723

<sup>10</sup> Lario (2003a): 25

of Salamanca that it was necessary to respect the conscience of all, as was already the case in the rest of Europa<sup>11</sup>. Similarly, Alfonso XII unconditionally supported civil rather than military authority, which was also immediately apparent in the confrontation between Cánovas and Martínez Campos, the restoration General<sup>12</sup>.

He played the role of the constitutional king, requiring for example in-depth knowledge of affairs of government and the status and capacity to intervene in the latter; hence his lengthy and exceptionally private interview with Layard, the British ambassador, from whom he sought advice on constitutional practices. By then there were accusations of ‘kidnapping of the royal prerogative’ by Cánovas, the predominance of ‘ministerial favourites’, the ‘ministerial dictatorship’, justified by the inefficiencies of the administration, completely politicised, even in the case of the ministry doormen; and Alfonso XII was careful not to be a prisoner to one party or one government, so endeavoured to familiarise himself with the content of documents that required his signature, demanding that these were submitted to him with sufficient notice. So he assured the British Ambassador in the aforementioned interview that he was prepared to be fully constitutional and, if it were necessary, impose that type of government in Spain just as he had experienced it in England, in relation to which Layard advised prudence.

Thus, at the beginning of the ‘Cánovas dictatorship’, Alfonso XII intervened more than had been anticipated and Cánovas complained that ‘we have a master’, warning him not to exercise his powers in a literal sense, while he was christened the ‘boy king’. The fact is that he himself used the king’s theoretical power when it suited, claiming the ‘royal prerogative’, or on the other hand imposed upon him parliamentary doctrine: ‘with the support of the King he sought to override Parliament and with the support of Parliament he sought to override the King’; but a barely representative Parliament, dominated by the governments that organised the elections, and a king who could resort to personal whim, to the politics that had definitively been discarded with the fall of Isabella II; it was in this context that the King imposed the two-party system upon Cánovas, summoning the liberals in 1881<sup>13</sup>.

### **The king’s support for civilism**

General Martínez Campos was the military “restorer” and Cánovas the civilian “restorer” of the monarchy 1874, but they did not enjoy a good relationship, as one can imagine. Martínez Campos’s distrust of Cánovas, complete rejection even of some of his actions, was apparent in his criticism of Cánovas’s opposition to Isabella II’s aspiration to return to Spain, and in his being prepared to disobey him in favour of the ex-queen’s claims and in agreement with the Moderate party<sup>14</sup>. However Martínez Campos never dared to contest the politician’s predominant position in the shaping of the regime, though neither was he prepared to be relegated to inactive status. For this reason, until the Constitution was established and the two parties fully formed, Cánovas had in Martínez Campos genuine opposition in support of the old moderate party before the Crown, and had to face him on several occasions.

The confrontation between the two occurred as soon as the King endorsed the first government on January 9, 1875, entering Spain via Barcelona; in this government Martínez

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<sup>11</sup> See Lario (2003a), Silvela (1902):723

<sup>12</sup> Lario (1999): 109-114

<sup>13</sup> Lario (2003a), Lario (1999): 132-139, 143

<sup>14</sup> Reproduction of his letters in Piralá (1904-1906): 517-519. Varela Ortega (1977): 92 and ff.

Campos had no portfolio, although he had been expected to be appointed Minister of War, and instead he was promoted to Lieutenant General and named Captain General of Catalonia, which meant a distancing from the political centre. From that new position he presented the Government with its first problems<sup>15</sup>, tendering his resignation from the new post twelve days later in an angry and pressing letter, warning Cánovas that he was not prepared to suffer slights, condemning the way that those who had done most to had done most to facilitate Alfonso XII's accession had been forgotten: 'the Government owes me a little and in exchange I request either my garrison or consideration towards me'<sup>16</sup>. Cánovas's decision was immediately to inform the King, who after reaching Madrid on the 14th had departed for the northern front of the continuing Carlist War; he issued an ultimatum to the king, threatening to resign in the event of his demand not being satisfied, insisting that a question of dignity prevented him from putting up with the pressure exerted by Martínez Campos in his quest to control the government; so that as a simple matter of trust he demanded that the King sign 'a royal resolution communicated by the Minister of War to General Martínez Campos ordering him to remain in his post until H.M.'s return to Madrid', which the King fulfilled to the letter '... whatever the services of the said General and my heartfelt desire maintain him in activity ... Your Excellency and the Government can count on my full support and confidence'<sup>17</sup>.

It was in the context of the struggle between the two powers at the time, that of Martínez Campos with the possibility of support from much of the army, and that of Cánovas en route to establishing a political organisation, with the King as sole possible mediator, when Cánovas used the power he had to defend civil power and his own. And thus, following the unequivocal confirmation of royal confidence in civil power, a government decree appeared in the February 5 Official Gazette restricting military participation in politics, in a clear triumph of civilist politics over the aspirations of the Restoration Generals themselves – although other interpretations exist, from the context it may be deduced that Cánovas's intention was to contain the pressure being exerted the pro-Restoration military, clearly demonstrating the Crown's support for civil power-<sup>18</sup>. It was precisely during those initial moments that the politician succeeded in triumphing over the soldier and as a consequence over direct military intervention in politics, particularly in the sense of wanting to place the King above the council of ministers – which was achieved at the end of the century-. In the end Martínez Campos settled for being present in Madrid on February 13 when the King returned from the front, dispelling the threat of some kind of military demonstration<sup>19</sup>.

However this was not the end of the tension between the administrators of the Restoration, and on May 22 Martínez Campos sent a telegram to Alfonso XII in which he once again threatened to resign, considering himself to be under-appreciated and too far from Madrid, owing to his moderate political stance<sup>20</sup>. The clashes with the Government now resulted from problems in the handling of the Carlist War, Martínez Campos considering the King

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<sup>15</sup> AP, drawer 22/43: 22-05-1875, telegram from Martínez Campos to Alfonso XII. The Moderates had established for the General a plan of conduct, and Martínez Campos negotiated with the Government his departure from Madrid in exchange for the long-awaited military parade: Varela Ortega (1975): 90-91

<sup>16</sup> Archivo Cánovas (AC): 21-01-1875, Letter from Martínez Campos to Cánovas. On Martínez Campos's belief that the Government had not acknowledged his role in the Restoration: PRO, FO.72/1412: 4-10-1875, Layard to Derby.

<sup>17</sup> AP, drawer 25/E, 1 and 2: 27-01-1875, Telegrams from Cánovas and the King. It is certainly not unreasonable to agree with Varela Ortega (1977):99: 'It is difficult to exaggerate the political importance of the Crown from the very beginning'

<sup>18</sup> Varela Ortega (1977): 111

<sup>19</sup> AP, drawer 21/14-A: 8-02-1875, Cánovas to Alfonso XII

<sup>20</sup> AP, drawer 22/43

to be his sole superior while acting as Commander-in-Chief of his troops; in other words, he did not attribute to the Government the capacity to run the war. The Government, meanwhile, insisted on discarding the plans of Martínez Campos, whose intention was to lay siege to Olot, without prior consultation. But once again civil power found the source of its dignity in the king, when military command was taken away from him, and Jovellar informed the General that his stance constituted ‘an undermining of the principle of authority’ and that the King ‘as proposed by the Council of Ministers, does not accept this resignation which is based on inaccurate facts and considerations’, adding furthermore the principle that no soldier may resign if not exclusively for justified health reasons, leaving to the Government the capacity to act in accordance<sup>21</sup>. It was the attempt to end the Restoration General’s repeated use of his resignation as means of exerting pressure upon the Crown and the Government. It is not surprising, then, that this General’s situation during the early days of the Restoration was quite strained, and that given the circumstances his dignity was injured. In fact this was not his last resignation and his postings were increasingly distant.

In spite of everything, Martínez Campos continued to make his presence felt in any contentious issue, aware of his relevance, and one way or another he succeeded in maintaining his importance, which, in the long term, saw him become Prime Minister and not miss a single royal consultation. Henceforth he would communicate his decisions to Cánovas on his own account, given the lack of success with the king<sup>22</sup>. Only with the end of the Carlist War and the first days of Parliament, events that coincided in time, did civil-military tension dissipate; moreover, at the time Martínez Campos was even further removed from the political centre, as he was soon posted to Cuba, still in conflict. Cánovas, during these initial stages, apart from the space of power demanded by Martínez Campos, faced no political opposition other than that of the Moderates, who sought the wholesale restitution of the 1845 Constitution, and whom Cánovas strove to neutralise in order to form the new conservative party under his leadership<sup>23</sup>, while he attempted to ‘tame’ the Constitutional party<sup>24</sup>.

### **The shaping of the two-party system**

In the first elections of the Restoration, Cánovas opted for universal suffrage so as to achieve the greatest possible support for the monarchy, in a kind of natural continuation of the revolutionary process, since universal suffrage was going to legislate future restricted suffrage. This strategy resulted in his first exit from power in what was intended to be a mere interlude, leaving as a substitute the Minister of War, Jovellar, but which led to his first confrontation with the King.

His return as head of government on December 2 was the culmination of the triumph of the new Liberal Conservative party grouped together both dissidents from the Constitutional party and pro-Cánovas Moderates, exploiting the activity of the former in their struggle against Sagasta. The new Conservative government was the longest, as it lasted until March 1879, three and a half years. Cánovas saw how Sagasta was gathering around himself a strong political group in his quest to attain power, and himself was in a hurry to achieve clear

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<sup>21</sup> AP, drawer 22/43, telegrams between Martínez Campos and Jovellar in May 1875.

<sup>22</sup> *Archivo Cánovas* (AC): 27-01-1876, letter from Martínez Campos to Cánovas

<sup>23</sup> The attitude of the Moderates in correspondence between Cánovas and Durán I Bas in 1875: Riquer I Permanyer (1990)

<sup>24</sup> Varela Ortega (1977): 89

control of a party that he united and led, independent of the predominance of the traditional groups.

Sagasta and Cánovas had reached an agreement at the end of 1874 to accept the restored monarchy and the essence of the revolutionary legislation, but Sagasta postponed his unconditional acceptance under the pretext of the government's repressive policy and seeking to safeguard his leadership, as he explained to the president of the constitutional committee of Tangiers; it was internal struggles and Cánovas's intervention in support of dissidence that led Sagasta opportunely to declare via the newspaper *La Iberia* that 'the entire party recognises and respects the constitutional monarchy of D. Alfonso XII', whilst he condemned Cánovas's manoeuvring aimed at forming an 'ideal' party with the dissidence that he incited in his party<sup>25</sup>. But the King very soon expressed his desire to call the liberals to power in order to initiate as quickly as possible the alternation of parties and bring an end to Cánovas's domination. This was apparent the first time that Cánovas abandoned power, leaving Jovellar as substitute, in 1875, when the king hampered his return, evincing his displeasure at the way Cánovas manoeuvred behind his back; this was when Cánovas threatened to abandon politics and the country if his request to return to government was not met, also publishing a brief article in which he made an 'extraordinary announcement' to the effect that he had abandoned power when it suited him and would take it again when he saw fit, threatening to leave the country<sup>26</sup>.

So by 1879 Cánovas had been in power for five years, except for that brief period of time, though only two and a half since the adoption of the Constitution. It should be noted that two and a half to three years was considered, as Cánovas himself stated later and was accepted in the pact, time enough to implement any programme. However at that point Sagasta and his constitutional party could not yet be relied upon, and in fact this continued to be the case for him until the king's premature death in 1885, when the political pact was signed.

This was the context in which the King attempted to form an 'electoral government', sought a broad consensus to free the elections of partisan dominance and, thus, bring about a durable government; agreement was not reached but this attempt was supported in Parliament by both Cánovas and Sagasta, with the latter claiming that the King regarded Martínez Campos as the person most likely to succeed in this initiative<sup>27</sup>; however, the Cánovas Government had already extended to the electoral network, completing the provincial and municipal electoral processes, preventing the new government from leaving the conservative camp; this was what led to the confrontation between Martínez Campos and Cánovas, as the latter did not allow the former to implement his programme and the General abandoned the conservative party, adding his followers to the ranks of those who supported Sagasta<sup>28</sup>. This union between Martínez Campos and Sagasta was proven to be decisive two years later when, in 1881, the latter was summoned to power by the King, since there was no longer any doubt vis-à-vis the monarchism and reliability of his party.

In the search for and confirmation of the party that should alternate with Cánovas, the King played a personal and decisive role in calling Sagasta in 1881 and thus initiating the rotation of parties, though this was not yet a peaceful situation, since Cánovas refused to assume

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<sup>25</sup> AP, 25/N: 02-05-1875, Sagasta to Francisco Sastre

<sup>26</sup> PRO, FO.72/1412: 4-10-1875; 72/1413: 17-11-1875, 30-12-1875, Layard to Derby. *El Imparcial*, 26-10-1900, 'Adelanto político'

<sup>27</sup> DSC, 1879-1880,II: 14-07-1879, Sagasta and Cánovas

<sup>28</sup> See the details in Lario (1999):123-139, and Lario (2017): 243-276

responsibility for his arrival. In this way he helped to lend substance and cohesion to what Sagasta was building and decide as to its suitability, as Cánovas was trying other alternatives because he did not consider Sagasta to be sufficiently reliable to propose him as his successor in government. Alfonso XII's decisive participation, which is evidenced by detailed analysis of the process of change of government, was noted by Francisco Silvela, conservative prime minister at the end of the century, in saying that he achieved this 'with greater decision and success than were employed and achieved by D. Amadeo de Saboya to form in his own interest a conservative government', claiming that credit was due to the King for his 'persistent labour and resolution in exploiting the precise moment when best to summon the liberal party to power'<sup>29</sup>.

The Crown found itself in the middle of the power struggle, for Sagasta portrayed the King as Cánovas's prisoner, and in the Upper House Martínez Campos led the *liga de la dignidad* with eminent army officers, presenting a Cánovas opposed to the king and declaring the 'kidnapping of the royal prerogative'. Thus, when the king called Sagasta to government, Cánovas did not want to endorse the change, and this was initiated by the King's lack of confidence in the conservative leader, and settled without royal consultation. There was talk of the threat of a republic and to the king's own life. Romero Robledo said that 'there are few more dismal crises than that of February 8', describing the King's appointment of Sagasta as a 'fatal legislature'. Cánovas took advantage to warn of the danger of the moral and historical responsibility that the monarchy would accumulate if pure constitutional theory were abided by. The pact between parties would attempt to resolve this problem<sup>30</sup>.

Prior to the pact there were no established rules according to which changes of government might be administered, which is why, only during the first crisis that arose while the Constitution was in force, with Martínez Campos's exit from power, the parliamentary presidents were consulted. The only rules in force at the time were the need for agreement in electing the president of the Lower House, and the need to control the appointment of life-term senators, though this was not very effective at the time. Indeed, the considerable number of conservative senators appointed by Cánovas was one of the causes of the withdrawal – prelude to rebellion – of the Constitutional Party, so every crisis during his reign created a practical need, until the pact normalised the process and it became obligatory to comply with these rules.

### **The peaceful turn: a similar practice to the ideal of parliamentary government?**

Only from November 1885 onwards, after the pact concluded upon Alfonso XII's death, is it possible to speak of peaceful turn, of agreed alternation between the parties, as was acknowledged by the conservatives own newspaper, *La Época*. From then onwards the model of political change agreed upon between the parties provided far greater protection of the monarch's lack of political responsibility as they accepted the same criteria to abandon and access power. But this was done at the expense of electoral sincerity to arrive at a practice that was as close as possible to the ideal of parliamentary government, given the corrupt electoral practices, in other words organising from the Ministry of the Interior the electoral map with its results.

The year of Alfonso XII's death and the pact, the situation was very tense and people feared the worst, with Cánovas's government facing considerable difficulty. The presence of the

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<sup>29</sup> Silvela (1902): 723.

<sup>30</sup> Lario (1999): 149-165. Noteworthy is the report by Nuncio Bianchi, 25-03-1881: *Archivo Secreto Vaticano, Nunciatura de Madrid (ASV, NM)*, 511: 538-539

Ultramontano Pidal in Public Education and his opinions on religious and academic freedom meant the Cabinet had a chequered history from the word go, since, as the British Ambassador commented, the Ultramontanos for the Conservatives and the Republicans for the Liberals, were their weakness as well as their strength<sup>31</sup>. Pidal's defence in Parliament of the Pope's temporal power in opposition to Italian unity triggered a diplomatic conflict that forced Cánovas to intervene in favour of the aforementioned unity initially to end up declaring the Roman question to be an international issue and offering explanations to the Nuncio, when the latter threatened, on his own initiative, not to attend the King's saint's day and exploit his friendship with some senators to create opposition to Cánovas within his party<sup>32</sup>. In this atmosphere a confrontation took place in November at the University between conservative and liberal students, which began with the demonstration staged by the former and gradually escalated until it ended with the security forces raiding the Central University. Thus, both on the streets and in Parliament, 1885 dawned with heated and sometimes violent debates; there was talk of the end of the reconciliation proposed by the Conservatives at the start of the Restoration, Sagasta referred to a climate of civil war between Catholics and Liberals; on February 14, Castelar recalled, as León y Castillo had done the previous year, for different reasons, the ills of the reign of Isabella II: 'in truth I tell you that the policies of the Neo-Catholics toppled the Throne of Isabella II and will now topple the Throne of Alfonso XII'<sup>33</sup>. In the second half of November, when the King was already very ill, Zorrilla's revolutionary activity, his rumoured Alliance with Castelar, the increased movement of the Carlists, and even concern over Montpensier's renewed aspirations and fear of the queen-mother's attitude appeared to threaten all that had been achieved so far<sup>34</sup>.

By October concern began to be expressed over the King's health in circles close to the royal family, and he moved to El Pardo early in November<sup>35</sup>; since the year before there had been uncertainty with regard to his health although he had survived another major crisis as a result of the tuberculosis from which he suffered. That month there was a life-threatening deterioration that mobilised political leaders. In early November Martínez Campos had met the senior figures of fusionism – former Constitutional Party members- and seemingly with some Democrats too so as to adopt 'a line of conduct in the event of the King's death, with agreement to defend the 'constitutional solution with the regency of D<sup>a</sup> Cristina', and wholeheartedly supporting a Sagasta government, given the weak situation of the Cánovas government in the Palace too, where he was ignored. Martínez Campos was the great administrator, the nucleus around which all the forces moved, and Cánovas himself, who the previous year had attempted to oust him by posting him to the Philippines, called him in order to find the best solution given the difficult circumstances that were anticipated, even accepting the arrival of Sagasta, as he himself explained in Parliament. But Martínez Campos did not only hold meetings with the main political leaders and the queen but, as was to be expected, with the most prominent generals, reaching what might be termed a military pact, an 'accordo che sembra sincero dei capi piú influenti dell'esercito e di tutti i partiti monarchici di sostenere la legalità della Reggenza'<sup>36</sup>, to which was added the 'religious pact', with Sagasta's pledge to do nothing that might alter relations between Church and State, and the Nuncio's not to create problems for the new government –despite his insistence on the public education

<sup>31</sup> PRO, FO 72/1706: 29-11-1885, Bunsen a Salisbury.

<sup>32</sup> *Archivo Secreto Vaticano, Secretaría de Estado* (ASV, SS), 1885, 249.3: 6-12, 8 and 13-02-1885. Campomar (1986): 267-315. Robles (1988): 307-329

<sup>33</sup> cit. in Campomar (1986): 305. DSC, 1884-1885, II: 25-06-1884, León y Castillo

<sup>34</sup> AP, drawer 26/1.A, letter from Ricardo López to M. , sent by the Ambassador in London (Manuel Rancés and Villanueva, Marquis of Casa-laiglesia)

<sup>35</sup> ASV, SS, 1885, 249, 5: 142-143, 5-11-1885

<sup>36</sup> ASV, SS, 1886, 249.2: 31-12-1885, Rampolla to Jacobini, p. 86



law-, as well as bringing together the Spanish bishops at the King's funeral –at Alonso Martínez's request-, bringing an end to the Church's struggle against liberalism<sup>37</sup>.

The so-called 'Pacto de El Pardo', which usually refers only to the agreement between Cánovas and Sagasta, was the culmination of all the previous agreements and took place at the Government Presidency in Madrid late at night on November 24; at this meeting Cánovas promised Sagasta 'la sua leale cooperazione fino a tanto che questo si mantenga nel buon cammino e non minacci le istituzioni fondamentali dello Stato'. Cánovas was the only one who did not meet M<sup>a</sup> Cristina until the moment of his resignation, once the King had died, which perhaps confirms his difficult position at the Palace<sup>38</sup>. Thus was sealed the pact of allegiance between the two leaders and the Crown in order to administer the future King's minority, itself a further element of uncertainty, in the light of María Cristina's pregnancy and the appointment of her daughter the Infanta Mercedes as Princess of Asturias, unless she gave birth to a male, who would have prior right, as occurred six months later. The priority was to rally all the monarchists around M<sup>a</sup> Cristina in order to defend the political Project of the Restoration, which meant ending radical programmes, specifically that which constituted Sagasta's Liberal party, successor to the Fusionists, thus eliminating the famous art. 5 of the *ley de garantías* that established the reform of the Constitution as the basis of their programme. Three days after the King's death, the Conservative newspaper *La Época* was already warning Sagasta against this law, albeit acknowledging that it was a compromise, since 'he also knows what he owes the monarchy, and all the more so in this profound crisis, as if not to fulfil, first and foremost, his duties as a statesman', which is why he was reminded that 'in his hands' was 'the future of the nation and its institutions'<sup>39</sup>.

Another no less pressing need in order to safeguard the system was that of keeping in the hands of political leaders control of changes in government, which would avoid the unknown quantity of the royal prerogative in the hands of a virtually unknown young, foreign widow who might well repeat past errors, in constant allusion to the reign of Isabella II, as was clearly expressed by the Nuncio: 'vale a dire che mantenga una condotta talmente rispettabile che tutti vi si possano specchiare, e non accresca la gelosie e la invidie degli uomini politici, facendosi strumento di favoritismo'<sup>40</sup>; there was a sense of the need to control a power that could be exercised personally, forgetting that exclusivism should be avoided; what was described as the 'mutual belligerence' between the leaders fulfilled this objective, with the pact assuming the form of a double control, upwards vis-à-vis the royal prerogative, and downwards with regard to elections and relations within and between the parties, with an agreement to put an end to 'factions', dissidence or intermediary parties, while there was encouragement of representation and therefore the path of legality of Carlists and Republicans, the latter represented above and beyond their own capacity, and that of the Carlists<sup>41</sup>.

### **The pact and the consolidation of the monarchy**

The King's death was a source of great insecurity among the royalists, as he was thought to be 'the only mainstay of the Monarchy'; María Cristina was not relied upon to tackle the

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<sup>37</sup>ASV, SS, 1886, 249.2: 14-01-1886, Rampolla to Jacobini on the meeting with Sagasta. The Pope's satisfaction: ASV, NM 533: 580, 23-12-1885, Jacobini to Rampolla

<sup>38</sup> Details of the entire process in Lario (1999): 187-216

<sup>39</sup> *La Época*, 28-11-1885, 'El Programa liberal'

<sup>40</sup>ASV, SS, 1886, 249.2: 28-05-1886, Report by Rampolla, pp. 154-155

<sup>41</sup> Details of relations between the parties and between the latter and the Crown, in Lario (1999): 57-105

crisis, as to date she had shown no interest in politics, and on a personal level did not inspire much confidence either:

‘The queen was almost unknown in Spain... public sentiment certainly did not favour Her Majesty... (she had) a very strict sense of the privileges of royalty, which could not sit well with the Spanish populace. She barely spoke our language and was said not to sympathise with our customs... No country was prepared, above or below, for such uncertain and dangerous temporariness... I do not even admit as a favourable circumstance... that classic Spanish nobility...’<sup>42</sup>

Not for nothing was she a woman and foreign, with only seven years’ residence in Spain, which cast doubt on her knowledge of Spain’s history and political system, coming as she did from a country like Austria with no tradition of parliamentary government; this seems to have led to surprise at her not insisting on the continuation in government of the Conservatives. A major factor too was that she was a woman, after the experience of Isabella II, as we have seen, as since she was widowed at a very young age and Cánovas had already said in *El Solitario y su tiempo* that the reign of women, and young women in particular, was inevitably associated with uprisings<sup>43</sup>. However, from the outset the regent’s conduct was highly commended in both private and public spheres, with a swift change of attitude ‘both among ministers and within the diplomatic corps and high society’ and praise of previously undiscovered qualities such as ‘character, virtue and tact’, which aroused ‘respect and sympathy’, even in the case of the republican Castelar and other anti-dynastic individuals, according to the report issued by the Nuncio, who understood that her reign rendered less likely the prospect of a republic. The regent, educated and energetic, with discretion and tact, attended to everything and wished to be informed of everything, as well as gain the support and respect of the nation<sup>44</sup>. To which should be added the mutual good impression caused by the regent and the liberal leader, though this was not the case with Cánovas.

In spite of the instability resulting from the pact, the agreed and rhythmic changes, stable leaderships and unprecedented harmonious relationship between government and opposition, materialised in the briefing notes informing the opposition of the most relevant issues, from the last moments of Sagasta’s “worrying” long government, when it was feared that the pact might not be respected, the generals once again made themselves heard, strategically employed perhaps in light of the aforementioned fear. The fact is that Cassola, with the question of the constantly deferred military reform, began to speak out in Parliament with threatening declarations regarding direct military intervention, and the liberal newspaper *El Imparcial* illustrated from August 5, 1889 onwards the danger of military leadership, as did Castelar in a letter to Sagasta dated January 2, 1890, recalling Pavia. But it was the Dabán affair (his troops had marched with Martínez Campos in favour of the Restoration) the following March that heralded the return of the military problem to the public sphere. It was during the ‘deepest crisis of the Restoration’ when Cánovas’s civilist project began to fall apart, due to the use within the political struggle of the army’s discontent. This increased in the wake of the new Cuban uprising in February 1895, when Cánovas clearly sided with the military, alongside the liberal Moret, author of the 1906 law on jurisdictions, which already favoured military jurisdiction. Salmerón saw the country as submitted to the designs of a

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<sup>42</sup> Canals (1902). **PRO**, FO 72/1706: 25 and 29-11-1885, Bunsen

<sup>43</sup> Fernández Almagro (1975): 355.

<sup>44</sup> **ASV, SS**, 1886, 249.2: 26-11-1885; 14 and 28-01-1886, Nuncio Rampolla following his private audience with the regent, pp. 95, 109, 155

dictator, and sabre-rattling was gain heard in Parliament while outside the Lower House cries of “Death to politicians!” were heard<sup>45</sup>.

In his first government of the Regency, Cánovas had already been portrayed as ‘unknown and decanonized’, with an internal rival of the category of Francisco Silvela, who had participated in the government of Martínez Campos and was prepared to clean up politics, and once again Romero Robledo as ally of Cánovas and representative of the old practices. From that point on Cánovas represented the politics of the past and Silvela those of the future; there was also talk of ‘the healthy elements and the courtiers of la Huerta’ – in reference to Cánovas’s house -. As a consequence of this crisis, there began to be consideration of the formation of a social Catholic party led by Silvela, Martínez Campos and Cardinal Cascajares with the support of the regent<sup>46</sup>.

Cánovas’s last government, formed via military imposition, was known as the ‘government of resentment’, in which Silvela was already regarded as excluded from the party, very critical as he was of the generals’ involvement, and when Cánovas sensed a conspiracy around him in support of the reformers. This is when the confrontation between Cánovas and the Regent was apparent<sup>47</sup>. In spite of this, after Cánovas’s assassination by an anarchist in 1897, Silvela appeared to be the natural heir, so he requested Sagasta’s approval to enter government, which is what happened just under two years later, in March 1899. But between these two dates the colonies were lost and there began to be talk of the crisis of the parties and the need for national governments, which was seen even by the regent as contrary to the ‘parliamentary and monarchic system’ that required government and opposition<sup>48</sup>.

Owing to this belief that ‘the two government parties that have to date governed during the Regency have failed,’ the Crown found itself at the centre of all aspirations to reform, as it was seen as the only institution capable of provoking change, and thus assumed the enormous responsibility for ‘whether or not the regime fails’<sup>49</sup>. María Cristina opted unambiguously for reform, and her response to Cardinal Cascajares could not have been more explicit: ‘it is necessary at all costs to tread a new path, ‘undertake major reforms’ in respect of ‘morality, decentralization, the disappearance of despotism, albeit with ‘great caution’, for she was aware of the difficulties, including the formation of new parties without the participation of Sagasta and Silvela, in the hope of finding a un ‘Bismarck’ capable of implementing conservative social politics: ‘That a Bismarck is required is undeniable, but Bismarcks are not manufactured’<sup>50</sup>. The time seemed to have arrived for the monarchy to ‘restore’ politics, after politics had ‘restored’ the monarchy, in a reversal of roles in which appeared a discredited governmental power and a monarchic power as the only hope for the future.

Silvela’s within and beyond his party combined with the conflicts once again caused by the religious question at the time of the planned marriage of the Princess of Asturias to a Carlist prince –two weeks earlier Galdós premiered *Electra*, which prompted anti-clerical demonstrations-, the Catalan regionalism that deeply concerned M<sup>a</sup> Cristina, the new social

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<sup>45</sup> Lario (1999): 299-315. DSC, 1894-95,VI: 02-04-1895, Salmerón

<sup>46</sup> AP, drawer 6/10-A, Cascajares to the Regent, 24-12-1891. Lario (1999): 268, 271, 274, 296, 315 and ff. *La Época*, 19-01-1895, *La crisis y el tercer partido. El Imparcial*, 19-01-1895, *Un tercer partido*

<sup>47</sup> Lario (1999): 315-332

<sup>48</sup> AP, cajón 6/10-A: 28-11-1898, Alfonso de Aguilar, María Cristina’s secretary, to Cascajares

<sup>49</sup> *El Imparcial*, 1-12-1898, ‘El despertar del espíritu público’

<sup>50</sup> Lario (1999): 362 and ff.

mobilisation in opposition to the government's economic reforms, the growing activity of the socialists, and finally the manifest and increasingly audacious military discontent that conditioned the government; it was a 'conflict a day', as the regent is believed to have said, and she generated distrust of Silvela, and intervened decisively in his fall. There were endless rumours of uprisings and the British Ambassador reported in 1899 the possibility of 'an explosion' at any moment and of any kind, in the same way that the Nuncio warned of the danger at the time of Carlist insurgency led by the Marquis of Cerralbo<sup>51</sup>.

It was in this context of end-of-century crisis, after the loss of the colonies, when the regent's clerical inclination and her preference for the social doctrine of the Church, led her to favour the new movements within the conservative party, which is why she gave a voice in royal consultations to all the dissident groups, definitively neglecting a basic law of the *turno*, namely that of not attributing *beligerancia* (not conceding political existence) to dissident groups within the major parties, in the interest of the two-party system and the unity and strength of its leaderships. But Maria wanted to leave her son, Alfonso XIII, a stable situation in the wake of the crisis of 98, and the Crown was at the centre of all efforts at reform, which materialised in the initial efforts at governments of national unity. There was a growing need to seek protection and refuge in the institution of the monarchy, contrasting the youth of the King, whose direct reign began on May 17, 1902 at the age of 16, with the increase in his responsibilities and doubts regarding his ability; Costa spoke of 'empty throne' and Canals expressed his opinion more clearly: '(there were) two singularly influential factors: the discredit of the monarchic parties and the misgivings prompted by the imminent reign of a child'<sup>52</sup>. Under such circumstances, Silvela thought it opportune, as early as 1900, to mention to anyone listening the future King's abilities, and thus he told Dato about his intervention to improve his image, providing the journalist with the necessary ideas with which to write the corresponding idea:

'with apparent indiscretion and entrusting the secret I inform everyone of what I have observed about the King, his insight, his determination to rule when he comes of age, what he told me while smoking a cigarette about «in a year and a half»... and thus the idea fades... and Quejana has translated this well («I gave him some ideas with which to prepare his article»)<sup>53</sup>.

So it was that Alfonso XIII found himself having to feign a strength of character in keeping with what was expected of him in the difficult circumstances under which he had been born to reign, amidst a parliamentary crisis and the search for a more effective power; so it comes as no surprise that shortly after the start of his reign proper there was talk of an 'eastern crisis... as might arise in a nation ruled by the Sultan of Turkey', in allusion not to the 'eastern' Palace, since it was not yet described so inappropriately and all crises were resolved inside it as it was the King who freely named and dismissed his ministers, but to the difference established since Montesquieu between monarchy and despotism<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> PRO, FO 72/2109, Wolff to Salisbury, 2-8-1899. ASV, SS, 1900, 249.1, Nuncio to Rampolla, 20-11-1900

<sup>52</sup> Canals (1902). Costa (1902): 177-183

<sup>53</sup> Archivo Dato (AD): 20-09-1900, Silvela to Dato. Lario (1999): 450

<sup>54</sup> AP, box12.941/13: 03/1906, note to the King (probably from Moret): "Urzáiz is the author of the sentence "Eastern crises". Morote (1904): 85 "Urzáiz described as "Eastern crisis": All in Lario (1999): 97, 480. See too in Lario (upcoming)

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