

# THE POLITICAL PERSECUTION OF THE CATALAN LANGUAGE

THE LOSS OF NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY IMPLIES, *IPSO FACTO*, THE IMPOSITION OF THE LANGUAGE OF THE INVADERS OR OPPRESSORS. THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE CASE OF CATALONIA.

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PHILIP V IN AN ALLEGORICAL ENGRAVING OF HIS VICTORY IN THE WAR OF SUCCESSION.

1920 CARICATURE INSPIRED BY THE SUPREME COURT'S SENTENCE AGAINST THE DRET CATALÀ (CATALAN LAW).

**T**he Catalan language can be found in several independent states: France, Spain, Andorra and Italy. Leaving aside Andorra, where Catalan is the only official language, and Italy, where the small number of Catalan-speakers have not yet obtained the rights of a linguistic minority, we shall concentrate our attention on France and Spain where the Catalan language is of greater importance. It is paradoxical, but the policy of language extermination conducted by France is practically the same as that of Spain. That is to say, the linguistic superstructure which differentiates the political, administrative and military structure of each of the two states is a result of the same opposition to the normal use of the Catalan language, persecuted without respite for centuries. It is an accepted fact that the dominant language of a country is the one used by those who have the political power. As a result, the loss of national sove-

reignty implies, *ipso facto*, the imposition of the language of the invaders or oppressors. This is exactly what has happened in the case of Catalonia. Northern Catalonia (the Roussillon, Vallespir, Conflent, Capcir and part of the Cerdanya) fell under the jurisdiction of the French monarchy by the Treaty of the Pyrenees in 1659. This changed not only the political, judicial and administrative institutions of the regions, but also meant that the French language was fiercely imposed. In the same way, when Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and Valencia lost the war against the Spanish army (1708-14), the entire political, financial and legislative systems were transformed, as well as the administration of justice and the administrative institutions themselves. Apart from this, a cultural and linguistic attack on Catalonia was started both in public and in secret. In both these cases, the persecution was begun by imposing the dominant

language of the oppressor state, and by suppressing the language which until then had been the official one of the dominated or defeated citizens. This process has various stages according to its sociological situation. In 1661 Louis XIV started the Frenchification of the Literary University of Perpignan. Later, the Marquis of Louvois (1676) gave orders that the sermons in the cathedral of Perpignan were to be given in French only. The *Consell Superior del Rosselló* gave orders that only francophones could occupy political offices and carry out public duties. By an edict of the year 1700, Louis XIV prohibited the use of the Catalan language for any public document, under penalty of its being declared null and void. Because of the lack of observance of this law, in 1738 it was decreed that in all the parishes only French was to be used in sacramental books. In 1754 it was reiterated that wills were not to be written in Catalan or they would be declared invalid.

The same process of persecution was pursued in the rest of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands and Valencia immediately after they were defeated by the Spanish army. This process began in the political institutions in Valencia (1707) and in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands (1715) (except Menorca which was under British sovereignty). The Decree of *Nueva Planta* officially prohibited the use of Catalan. In addition, the magistrates of the occupation were given instructions, in secret, to introduce Castilian with "furtive and careful efforts to achieve the required effect without the effort being noticeable".

In 1768, the enlightened government of the Count of Aranda forbade the use of Catalan in primary and secondary schools and in schools of rhetoric in all Catalan-speaking countries, and also recommended the bishops to do the same in their dioceses.

As a result of the royal decree of 1768, the publication of text-books was forbidden in the University of Cervera, and the Bishop of Majorca, Juan Diaz de la Guerra, ordered that all the books of the chapter Cathedral of Palma, and the parishes, were to be written in Castilian. In the city of Palma, Dr. Joan Vives was imprisoned for preaching the sermon of Lent in Catalan in 1773.

In 1772 merchants were prohibited from keeping their account books in Catalan, and in 1881 Manuel de Godoy ordered that plays were to be staged only in the Castilian language.

The school has been the instrument employed most by the ruling powers to de-Catalanize the citizens. In 1837, the highest political government of the Balearic Islands, as part of a progressive policy, prohibited the use of Catalan in schools. And in Barcelona in 1581, with the moderates in power, the prohibition of the use of Catalan in schools was reaffirmed, and the bailiffs were ordered to "prevent this abuse in public and private educational establishments of both sexes".

In 1860, O'Donnell's liberal government ordered the translation of all street names into Castilian. The same liberals prohibited the use of Catalan in public documents and notarial deeds in 1862.

When the moderates were in power in 1867, Gonzalez Bravo, Minister of the Interior, once again prohibited the sta-

ging of plays in Catalan. In 1870, the liberals banned the inscription of Catalan Christian names in the civil registry. The Spanish governments did the job thoroughly: public administration, the courts, schools and university, publishing, theatre, Christian names, street names, notarial deeds, etc. No European language had ever been prohibited by law so many times, nor persecuted so repeatedly.

Despite all this, however, before the end of the 1890s, the Madrid govern-



DL PLAT D'OLA PURA  
El català... Aquí només hi ha un Dret, que és aqueta. I al votem que us el odesteu, ja podreu esperar... asseentats.

ment, obsessed with the desire to eradicate the Catalan language completely, even banned its use on the telephone.

Yet even that was not enough, and in 1902, when the liberal Count of Romanones was ruling, a royal decree was issued which prohibited the teaching of the Christian doctrine in Catalan.

At the end of the nineteenth century however, literary Catalanism had become a doctrinal movement. When the ideology reached the masses, it created political forces which later became political parties.

These political parties acted as a check on the Spanish governments, and these stopped looking down on the Catalan language as a "dialect". Dialects are languages of people who have been defeated militarily or politically. This "truce" lasted until the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera (1923).

The dictator Primo de Rivera started lin-

guistic persecution once again, and dictated a series of measures in order to keep Catalan a secondary language. The town councils were allowed to speak in Catalan, but not to write it; if a teacher spoke Catalan in class he was transferred to a place where only Castilian was spoken, etc.

The Second Republic (1931-9) was a golden age. After 215 years of relentless linguistic persecution, Catalan was once again the official language when the Statute of Autonomy was proclaimed in 1932.

However, when the democrats lost the Civil War (1936-9) and General Franco set up a personal dictatorship, he carried out an inhuman pogrom against the Catalan language, which could be described as a genuine cultural aggression. Catalan was banned, with military force, from the entire educational system, the media, the telegraph service and commercial dealings. Books were not allowed to be written in Catalan, and everything published in Catalan was burned. Civil servants who spoke in Catalan were faced with instant dismissal. During the political transition (1975-7), the popular pressure which arose towards the end of the Franco dictatorship prepared for the return of official recognition of the Catalan language. This occurred when the statutes of autonomy of Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands were passed.

In spite of the legal restoration of Catalan, there are reticences even today on the part of the democratic government when it comes to making its definitive normalization effective. Although Catalan was officially recognized in the 1978 Constitution, and in the respective statutes of autonomy, an effort is being made to check and restrict its complete autonomy by the use of judicial sentences, and to keep it in an inferior position.

The distance between the present legal limitations and the sociological reality is so great, that only the pressure of popular and social forces will be able to place Catalan in the same position it held when persecution first began in 1715. It must not be forgotten that the Catalan language affects a quarter of the Spanish population, and for this reason no democratic government can ignore the immense responsibility involved.