

ELECTIONS '88

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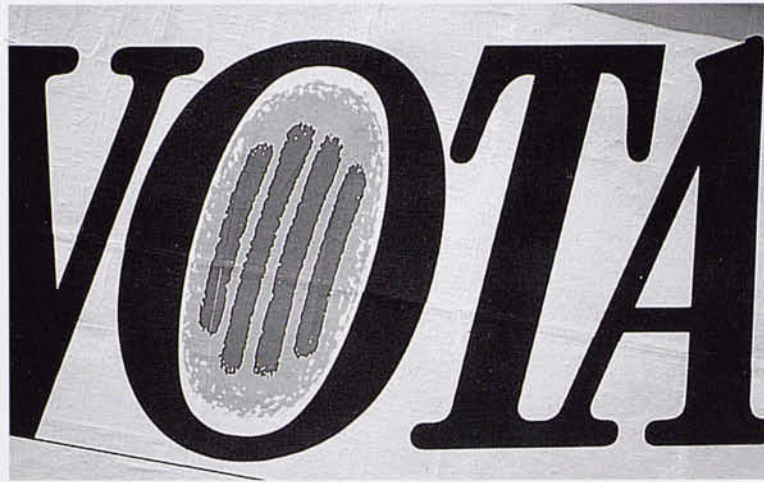
ALBERT VILADOT JOURNALIST

The nationalist centre coalition *Convergència i Unió* repeated its absolute majority in the Catalan parliament at the elections held on 29th May and will now form a government for the third consecutive time. This coalition, which brings together progressive and conservative sectors united essentially in the defence of the rights of Catalonia, had already won with an absolute majority in the elections of 1984. The results were as expected and there were no great surprises. At first it was believed that *Convergència i Unió* could win more seats than in 1984, and that the principal opposition party, the Socialist Party, would lose a few. In the end, this was not the case; *Convergència i Unió* lost three deputies and the Socialists gained one. The remaining political forces, to right and left, managed to increase their representation slightly, except for *Aliança Popular*, that was reduced by half.

These results, that caused no real surprise, allowed Jordi Pujol, the leader of *CiU*, to continue as president of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*, the maximum organ of home rule. Senyor Pujol has been president since 1980 and the popularity he enjoys goes beyond the bounds of his party and the nationalist ideology it defends. Jordi Pujol was elected president of the *Generalitat* in 1980 against all the odds. Since then, his political message has penetrated deeper and deeper into new social sectors who, like *CiU*, feel that the most important thing for Catalonia at this moment, in history is to reinforce its institutions, since it has no state of its own. For this reason, Pujol and his nationalist coalition argue for the political strengthening of the *Generalitat*, a relaunching of the economy and the penetration of elements of national identity (language, culture) into all social groups. In this respect, it

should be mentioned that just under half the population now resident in Catalonia (six million people) were born in other parts of the Iberian Peninsula. The immense majority of them settled in Catalonia for financial reasons. They did so during the Franco dictatorship, that is to say, at a time when Catalonia had no political or institutional mechanism by which to ensure a normal integration of such a massive human avalanche, totally ignorant of the historical and cultural reality of the country they were going to live in. In fact, these people were loaded with the anti-Catalan prejudices that the Franco government had fostered ever since the Civil War of 1936-1939.

At present, through a slow, delicate process, the hypothetical problem of the conflict between the two cultures is being successfully dealt with, thanks to the efforts of the various political and social



sectors. During the transition from dictatorship to democracy, hardly anyone has wanted to take advantage of this division between the two communities. On the contrary, a gradual integration of the immigrants in Catalonia has been achieved, at the same time as those who are Catalan by birth have gradually modified their own cultural habits. The language is not a cause for controversy: it is understood by 95 % of the population, spoken by two thirds and taught in schools without any problem.

Jordi Pujol, the winner of the May elections, is a firm supporter of this policy of gradual integration. This moderation is one of the reasons why he is so widely accepted. The main opposition party, the Socialists, are also in favour of this moderate cultural integration, but their links with the state Socialist party make important sectors of the electorate lose faith in their

capacity to act independently. This has worked against them in all the autonomic elections; on the other hand, when the elections affect the whole of Spain this dependence benefits them.

One of the great political challenges facing Catalonia over the next four years is that of relations with the central government. In fact, the majority of the Catalan electorate feels that the Socialist government has maintained a restrictive attitude before Catalan autonomy. Opinion polls published recently in the press show that there is a growing feeling in favour of broadening Catalonia's autonomy. This could involve a less restrictive interpretation of the present statute of autonomy (approved in 1979) or even its reform, as many people are already demanding. The increase in the parliamentary representation of those parties most concerned with the question of autonomy,

such as the communists of *Iniciativa per Catalunya* and the radical nationalists of *Esquerra Republicana*, also suggest that there is a growing sector of public opinion that is not satisfied with the present *status quo*. President Pujol himself does not consider the reform of the statutes necessary and prefers to speak of a more generous application of the present rules of the game. As for the Spanish government, it has not yet said what it intends to do, though it agrees with Jordi Pujol that the reform of the statutes is not necessary at the moment.

After the nationalist victory of 29th May, these are the basic characteristics of Catalan political life for the next four years. Never before has it been possible to hold three successive autonomic elections in Catalonia, and never before have the ideas expressed been so strongly in favour of self-government in all its different shades. ●