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# Patriotism and neutrality. The Spanish Parliament and the Great War, 1914–18<sup>1</sup>

MARCELLA AGLIETTI

## SUMMARY

Despite the pressure exerted by rival protagonists, the Spanish government chose not to be involved in the Great War. This decision converted Spain into a neutral state, formally outside of the conflict yet deeply involved in several ways. Espionage and smuggling conducted by the belligerents in Spanish territory called the sovereignty of the state into question. In an effort to reduce these violations, the Spanish government adopted measures limiting freedom and parliamentary powers that were constitutionally guaranteed. As a result of the research carried out in the historical archives of the *Cortes* of Madrid, this article will examine the parliamentary response to executive infringements on individual liberty and parliamentary rights, focusing on two main aspects. First, the manner in which the Spanish deputies attempted to preserve the authority and institutional primacy of the Parliament against executive power during the war will be examined. Second, special attention will be paid to the debates on legislation introducing ‘extraordinary powers’ of public authority in 1918. The results of this analysis allow for a further and more in-depth exploration of the conventional depiction of the Spanish Parliament as passive and irrelevant at the end of the Restoration era (1875–1923).

## THE WARTIME PARLIAMENTARISM OF A NEUTRAL COUNTRY

The history of the Spanish Parliament during the Great War has often been overlooked by scholars, because the *Cortes* of that period have always been portrayed as

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<sup>1</sup>This article has been written as part of the *proyecto de investigación* ‘El Mediterráneo en las relaciones internacionales de España durante la Primera Guerra Mundial’ (HAR2010-16680), financed by the Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación de España (2011–13) and directed by Fernando García Sanz. Abbreviations: *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes, Congreso de los Diputados* (DSC); *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes, Senado* (DSS); *Gaceta de Madrid* (GM); *Archivo General de la Administración* (AGA); *Archivo Histórico Nacional* (AHN).

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being merely a product of the executive branch's exploitation of *turnismo*<sup>2</sup> while manipulating election results through the *encasillado*<sup>3</sup> system. In reality, however, this view was the consequence of a widespread anti-parliamentary culture that had turned the legislative body into a scapegoat for a corrupt political system. Indeed, the influence of this characterization of the Spanish Parliament was so strong that it even led scholars to shift their focus to other aspects of public life.<sup>4</sup> By taking a different perspective and using *Diario de sesiones de las Cortes* as a source, however, the history of the Spanish Parliament has proven to be crucial in understanding both the political decisions that were made at the time as well as the relationships between the various institutions in Spain. Yet the history of the Spanish Parliament can also help to decipher the disjointed processes that characterized the changing political landscape at the end of the Restoration regime.

Furthermore, the Spanish situation can be examined within the wider context of European parliamentarism in order to highlight the similarities and differences, as well as the ways in which the latter influenced the former. This approach allows for an analysis that is not limited to a purely national focus. By examining recent studies carried out across various academic disciplines, the traditional image of a Spain on the fringes of the Great War can be radically revised. More extensive analysis of diplomatic and military sources has revealed the vital role that Spain played in the clash between the allied powers and the central powers in the secret intelligence war that was taking place at the time, and in operations aimed at securing supplies for the belligerent nations.<sup>5</sup> Additional themes have come to light as a result of comparative studies carried out on the neutral countries during the war,<sup>6</sup> ranging from the better known cases of Belgium and Luxembourg

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<sup>2</sup>*Turnismo* refers to a political system based on the alternation of power (taking 'turns') between the two main liberal dynastic parties, namely the conservative party and the liberal progressive party. When one party's term ended, the other would succeed it at the helm of government, thereby guaranteeing the stability of the constitutional monarchy (based on the constitution of 1876) and marginalizing more extreme political parties.

<sup>3</sup>The *encasillado* was a form of fixing political elections, and the term specifically referred to the list of electoral candidates drawn up by the government. Based on an agreement in place among the main liberal parties, the executive branch would use its power to assign districts to these candidates, where they would be elected.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, M. Cabrera, 'La reforma del reglamento de la Cámara de diputados en 1918', *Revista de Estudios Políticos* 93, (1996), pp. 345–57.

<sup>5</sup>See E. García, *¿España neutral? La Marina Mercante española durante la Primera Guerra Mundial* (Madrid, 2005); F.J. Ponce Marrero, *Canarias en la Gran Guerra, 1914–18: estrategia y diplomacia. Un estudio sobre la política exterior de España* (Gran Canaria, 2006); C. García Sanz, *La Primera Guerra Mundial en el estrecho de Gibraltar: economía, política y relaciones internacionales* (Madrid, 2011); F. García Sanz, *España en la Gran Guerra. Espías, diplomáticos y traficantes* (Barcelona, 2014).

<sup>6</sup>For the role played by the neutral countries, above all concerning the economic policy of the belligerent powers, see M. Frey, 'The Neutrals and World War One', *Defence Studies* 3, (2000), pp. 1–39. Additional ideas worthy of analysis were brought to light during the international seminar entitled 'Neutrality and Neutralities in the Great War. Latest Approaches to Economic Warfare', which was held at the Escuela Española de Historia y Arqueología in Rome on 18 November 2013.

to the lesser known examples of Holland<sup>7</sup> and Greece.<sup>8</sup> As far as Spain is concerned, much remains to be said about how the politics of the period dealt with violations of the country's sovereignty on the part of the belligerent nations. On the other hand, more attention has been paid to the foreign policy strategies put in place,<sup>9</sup> the direct effects of the war on domestic politics<sup>10</sup> and the systems of governance that were introduced in order to deal with the war's effects on civil society.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Spain was witness on more than one occasion to what historians have defined as 'forms of wartime government'.<sup>12</sup> There were numerous public speeches on the dynamics of a free-market economy<sup>13</sup> and in support of those citizens affected by the economic crisis or directly involved in the conflict (such as the sailors and seafarers who succumbed to underwater warfare);<sup>14</sup> significant limitations were placed on constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties and civil rights;<sup>15</sup> naturalization processes were suspended;<sup>16</sup> and certain ministers saw their administrative authority and powers reformed, in order that other ministers could benefit. All of these aspects left their mark on the parliamentary debate, as evidenced by a proposal previously put forward by a Spanish deputy in 1916 to institute a 'special ministry', the elements of which were entirely analogous to the 'wartime ministries' put in place by the belligerent countries. Its task was described in military

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<sup>7</sup>S. Kruizinga, 'NOT Neutrality. The Dutch Government, the Netherlands Oversea Trust Company, and the Entente Blockade of Germany, 1914–1918', in J. den Hertog and S. Kruizinga (eds), *Caught in the Middle: Neutrals, Neutrality, and the First World War* (Amsterdam, 2011), pp. 85–104.

<sup>8</sup>The case of Greece is just as interesting, and more can be found in T. Fregadi Areti, 'Violations de la neutralité grecque par les Puissances de l'Entente durant la Première guerre mondiale', *Balkan Studies* 1, (1985), pp. 113–29 and R. Porte, 'Comment faire plier un neutre? L'action politique et militaire de la France en Grèce (1915–1917)', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 81, (2010), pp. 45–62.

<sup>9</sup>See F. García Sanz, 'España y la Primera Guerra Mundial: síntesis de la política exterior durante la restauración', in *España entre repúblicas, 1868–1939: Actas VII Jornadas de Castilla – La Mancha sobre Investigación en Archivos*, vol. 2 (Guadalajara, 2007), pp. 703–24; R. Pardo Sanz, 'España ante el conflicto bélico de 1914–1918: ¿Una espléndida neutralidad?', in S. Forner (ed.), *Coyuntura internacional y política española (1898–2004)* (Madrid, 2010), pp. 45–64.

<sup>10</sup>M. Martorell Linares, "'No fue aquello solamente una guerra. Fue una revolución": España y la Primera Guerra Mundial', *Historia y Política* 26, (2011), pp. 17–45.

<sup>11</sup>An example of this can be seen in the humanitarian aid efforts spearheaded and financed by the Crown, and subject of J. Pando, *Un rey para la esperanza: la España humanitaria de Alfonso XIII en la Gran Guerra* (Madrid, 2010).

<sup>12</sup>This definition was used and defined for the first time in P. Renouvin, *Les Formes du gouvernement de guerre* 1915.

<sup>13</sup>For a few examples, the following bills were debated in 1916: a bill to offer aid to businesses, a project for an agricultural bank and a project for a foreign commerce bank.

<sup>14</sup>By the middle of 1917 more than one hundred sailors and seafarers had already died, and over 20 per cent of Spanish merchant shipping had been lost, García Sanz, *España en la Gran Guerra*, pp. 328–9.

<sup>15</sup>Please refer to M. Aglietti, 'Para garantizar el respeto a la neutralidad española. ¿Una ley liberticida y antiparlamentaria o la búsqueda de una perspectiva europea?', presented at the international conference 'Undeclared Neutrality: The Culture of Peace in Europe during the Great War' (Seville, 26–27 November 2014), and which will be published in the conference proceedings.

<sup>16</sup>There were many cases in which Spanish naturalization was denied because of the war, including to persons who were born in Spain to Spanish mothers. See AGA, (10)003.007.54/2431, *Ministerio de Estado, Nacionalidades, Asuntos contenciosos* (1919), ins. 10.

terms: to **prepare** ‘weapons and munitions for a commercial war’ and ‘a plan to rebuild the country’.<sup>17</sup>

Fabienne Bock’s study of the French Parliament during the Great War<sup>18</sup> is an excellent example of how the analysis of a country’s legislative body can offer a better understanding of the extent to which war acted as a driving force for institutional and administrative change. Apart from the inevitable differences between the two cases, Spain also witnessed the modernization of some of its administrative framework, while other organs of government missed the opportunity for change and at the end of the war they were reinstated to their original form. There is no doubt, however, that the war in Europe offered an important chance for parliamentary members to reflect on – and at times clash over – the nature of their work, especially in terms of how it related to the executive branch. This article will not focus on the well-known aspects of the crisis around the liberal monarchy that was taking place in that period,<sup>19</sup> in order that it can delve into the nature of the interaction between Parliament and the government on warfare issues.

The *Cortes* held 374 sessions between July 1914 and June 1919. While these figures were not extraordinarily high, this level of activity was certainly not limited to Spain, as other countries registered even lower numbers during the same period. For example, the Italian Chamber of Deputies – which on average held more than 100 sessions per year – held only 190 sessions between 1915 and 1918. In 1915 there were only 43 sessions registered, and even fewer in 1918, when a mere 38 were held.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the number of sessions held did not itself tell the whole story: in or out of session, the *Cortes* staked its claim to fulfilling a role that was necessary for the functioning of the state apparatus. Indeed, the government could not do without the *Cortes* lest it undermined its own legitimacy, and any laws introduced by decree were subject to a form of a posteriori sanction on the part of Parliament when they were subsequently ratified. This delay was justified by the state of emergency that was in place at the time. Furthermore, deputies and senators were offered an additional opportunity to participate in the political handling of the crisis and to keep it in check by being present on the numerous special commissions and committees that were established to deal with specific situations.

It would be just as mistaken to claim that the legislative branch had been stripped of its power by pointing to the fact that the topic of war scarcely appeared as an item on the parliamentary agenda. As was the case in other countries, Spain’s elected officials were effectively silenced because the ongoing conflict demanded

<sup>17</sup> Taken from the speech by the pro-Catalan deputy Francesc Cambó, in *DSC*, 31 October 1916, n. 79, p. 535.  
<sup>18</sup> F. Bock, *Un parlementarisme de guerre 1914–19* (Paris, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> There is not enough space here to offer an extensive treatment of the historiography on this topic, so I refer readers to the still indispensable works of: M. Cabrera *et al.* (eds), *Con luz y taquígrafos. El Parlamento en la Restauración (1913–1923)* (Madrid, 1998); and more recently, M.A. Martorell Linares, ‘La crisis parlamentaria de 1913–1917. La quiebra del sistema de relaciones parlamentarias de la Restauración’, *Revista de Estudios Políticos* 96, (1997), pp. 137–61. Please refer to the updated bibliography of this last work.

<sup>20</sup> I would like to thank Professor Michela Minesso for providing me with this data.

as much. Indeed, this was the new form of parliamentary patriotism that appeared across all of Europe: the government required unanimous support, strategic information was to be kept confidential and a certain degree of self-censorship was to be applied. And, no differently than the rest of Europe, Spanish deputies and senators opposed this level of discretion, which at times seemed excessive and even detrimental to freedom of expression and the rights thereto related; in the process, they were able to find new ways to interact with civil society. Without doubt, the most sensational instance of opposition was the convening of a second Parliament in July 1917, a year in which the *Cortes* sat for a mere two months. Entitled the *Asemblea de Parlamentarios disidentes*, almost 70 parliamentary members convened in Barcelona. Most of the participants were exponents of the Catalan *Lliga Regionalista*, but there were also socialists and republicans, as well as a dozen monarchists. They were all united in their goal to introduce sweeping political reform and to put an end to the *turno* system of government.<sup>21</sup> No less important was the supporting role played by the press gallery.<sup>22</sup> The press was a fundamental tool not only during *Cortes* recess periods, but also when the publication of *Diario de sesiones de las Cortes* was subject to censorship.<sup>23</sup> As a demonstration of their commitment to the Spanish people, elected representatives saw to the publication of excerpts and full transcripts of parliamentary debates in the press; ever since the *Cádiz* constitution of 1812, this had been an integral part of an elected official's duty in service to their country. By publishing more and more political articles and editorials – often penned under pseudonyms – in local papers and in papers with a party affiliation, Spanish representatives attempted to keep their finger on the pulse of the nation. The press thus came to embody the patriotic voice of Parliament. The government, however, resorted to a rhetoric of national defence in reacting to this behaviour, as it believed it had a patriotic duty to protect the Spanish people. Whenever a parliamentary member exposed the fragility of a country that was at the mercy of the belligerent powers, he would be accused of treason, sedition or defamation against the homeland, the king or one of his ministers, and proceedings of the supreme court would be initiated. The number of cases on record of such litigation is witness to the widespread use of this political tool at the time, although it did not seem to amount to much more than a deterrent. The *Cortes* would routinely vote down authorization to prosecute one of its own members, thereby forcing the supreme court to settle the charges with a ruling of 'sobreseimiento libre' (which was essentially an acquittal due to a stay of proceedings). This sentence was the equivalent of an acquittal, and there were also many cases in which pardons were granted.

<sup>21</sup>See F.J. Romero Salvadó, *España 1914–1918. Entre la guerra y la revolución* (Barcelona, 2002), pp. 119–40.

<sup>22</sup>At least 40 parliamentary members could be directly linked to journalism in 1916, many of whom were editors-in-chief of some of the most prominent newspapers in Madrid and in Spain, as was the case with *El Liberal*, *El Imparcial*, *El Heraldo de Madrid*, *ABC*, *La Correspondencia de España*, *El Radical*, *El Socialista*, *Diario universal* and others. See P. Gomez, Aparicio, *Historia del Periodismo español* (Madrid, 1974), v. 3, p. 447.

<sup>23</sup>The censorship of the publication – in whole or in part – of debates that were printed in the *Diario de sesiones de las Cortes* was not called off until June 1919. See *G.M.*, 24 June 1919.



To sum up, Spain's various institutions found numerous ways to appeal to patriotism, and in doing so they managed to incorporate – and at times clash with – the traditional, ingrained elements of the Restoration's political dialectic.<sup>24</sup>

While this article does not aim to offer a comprehensive analysis of the issue, it will examine some of the salient moments in the parliamentary debate over the Great War and, in particular, those exchanges which best shed light on the relationship between the government and the *Cortes*. As can be expected, these debates coincided with the outbreak of the war and with its conclusion (specifically, with the armistice of 11 November 1918, and later, with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919). It should be stated at the outset that, from the decision to remain neutral up to the official congratulatory messages sent out at the end of the conflict, the Spanish executive branch acted entirely on its own and presented any decisions to the Parliament as a *fait accompli*.

#### FROM THE PROCLAMATION OF NEUTRALITY TO THE PEACE TREATIES: THE WAR IN PARLIAMENT

When the war broke out, Eduardo Dato – who was the prime minister at the time and a member of the conservative party – proclaimed the neutrality of Spain without involving Parliament, which was not in session owing to its regular summer recess. The first announcement was published on 30 July 1914 in Madrid's *Gaceta Oficial*, on behalf of the *Ministerio de Estado*.<sup>25</sup> It was a short text which had been drawn up in response to information received from the Spanish ambassador in Vienna on the existing state of war between Austria–Hungary and Serbia. In it, 'Spanish subjects' were 'ordered' to adhere to 'the utmost neutrality, in accordance with the laws in force and with the principles of public international law'. Anyone who violated this order would lose the protection due to him or her as a subject of the Spanish kingdom; anyone who carried out or promoted military recruitment on national territory would be subject to the penalties set forth in the penal code (art. 150).

Considering the country's weakened condition from an economic – and above all, military – point of view, there was no other choice but to remain neutral.<sup>26</sup> It was hoped that Spain could establish some sort of role on the international scene as a champion of diplomacy in resolving the conflict, but any such aspirations were quickly dashed. Overall, the decision was met with some degree of consensus on the part of the representatives of the main political groups, despite the fact that they did not have an opportunity to debate the issue in Parliament; in any case, they did not hesitate to voice their opinions through the press. The same was true for Spanish society in general, as evidenced by the numerous expressions of approval that were sent directly to the government by local associations and institutions.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup>See M. Aglietti, 'Pan y toros. Parole e stereotipi della retorica elettorale liberale nella Spagna di fine Ottocento', in P. Finelli, V. Galimi and G.L. Fruci (eds), *Parole in azione. Strategie comunicative e ricezione del discorso politico in Europa fra Otto e Novecento* (Milan and Florence, 2012), pp. 127–45.

<sup>25</sup>*GM*, 30 July 1914, n. 211, p. 238.

<sup>26</sup>G. Maura and M. Fernández Almagro, *Por qué cayó Alfonso XIII* (Madrid, 1948), pp. 472–3.

<sup>27</sup>See AGA, (9) 02.08\_51/00051, *Presidencia del Gobierno, Subsecretaria*, Asuntos generales, various files.

At the opening of the *Cortes* on 30 October, 1914, the *Diario de sesiones* did not record any mention of the proclamation of neutrality that had taken place. This was despite the fact that several proclamations of a similar nature had been made, one after another, between July and September, upon the entry into war of each new combatant. Indeed, Dato did not present Parliament with the government's reasons for choosing neutrality until 5 November, when requested to do so by deputies hailing from the socialist republican minority. On that occasion, he limited himself to reaffirming that neutrality was the only remaining option for Spain, and that 'in terms of national defence', all the necessary measures would be taken 'without saying another word to the Parliament, in the firm belief that the chamber and the country stand ... side by side with the government'. If this position of neutrality were to go against the national interest at any point, 'we will turn to the Parliament before making even the slightest change to our status. ... And if the *Cortes* should be in recess, we will convene them so that they can decide on this fundamental issue for the life of Spain, because we, Sirs, have total faith and unwavering trust in the power of patriotism and in the wisdom of the *Cortes*.'<sup>28</sup> As those present applauded, Dato concluded his speech with an appeal to patriotic unity, that 'true form of national solidarity that brings everyone together, from the king down to every last citizen'. The radical Alejandro Lerroux and the socialist Pablo Iglesias were quick to voice their objections to Dato's message, and although they ended up being marginalized, their reasoning was certainly suggestive of dissent among the parliamentary members. Lerroux pointed out the inconsistency in claiming – as the prime minister had done – that 'the country would be consulted through its elected Parliament' in order to abandon its neutral stance, '[while] this had not been done in proclaiming neutrality'.<sup>29</sup> Iglesias protested that it was 'the government's duty' to respect 'the Parliament's right' to decide on a topic of such great importance, instead of 'locking it out' of the debate.<sup>30</sup>

The deputies from the Catalan *Lliga Regionalista* took up the issue on the following day. Juan Ventosa Calvell opened the session by accusing the executive branch of not having followed the example set by other European countries – whether belligerent or neutral – in dealing with the economic repercussions of the war. Indeed, other countries had wasted no time in setting up public institutions which would see to implementing any of the countless measures that the situation would require. In contrast, Spain was two months late in setting up a *Junta de iniciativas* (a commission in charge of formulating a series of economic proposals aimed at limiting the effects of the war on the domestic market). Furthermore, no concrete proposals had yet been made to Parliament.<sup>31</sup> It had been the 'vital forces of Spain' that made up for these shortcomings on the part of the

<sup>28</sup>*DSC*, 5 November 1914, n. 77, p. 2137.

<sup>29</sup>*DSC*, 5 November 1914, n. 77, p. 2138.

<sup>30</sup>*DSC*, 5 November 1914, n. 77, p. 2138.

<sup>31</sup>This *Junta* was set up by decree on 18 September 1914 and it should have lasted until the end of the war. It was dissolved on 2 February 1915, however, after having presented the government with almost 90 (87 to be precise) different initiatives based on the analysis and selection of 170 proposals that had been sent in from all over Spain on the part of companies, associations, industries etc.

government, as the country's associations and corporations had sent in potential initiatives to be undertaken by Parliament. All the proposals were worthy of attention, because, in Calvell's words, 'I do not believe that patriotism means holding one's peace, nor does it mean speaking in euphemisms; I believe, rather, that it is ... everyone's duty to speak up and express his own opinion.'<sup>32</sup>

On 23 November 1914, the government formally adopted the provisions of Hague Convention XIII of 18 October 1907, concerning the rights and duties of neutral powers in naval war.<sup>33</sup> Although this may have been due to pressure exerted by parliamentary members, it was more likely the result of the first serious consequences brought on by the war. Just a few weeks afterwards, the deputy Francesc Cambó questioned the relationship between Parliament and the government in terms of facing the economic problems that would inevitably sweep across the nation as the conflict unfolded.<sup>34</sup> A significant part of the sessions between 12 and 15 December would be dedicated to this debate, and other ministers besides Dato would have their say, including the finance minister, Bugallal. Cambó complained about the fact that the issue had not yet been the subject of extensive debate, and that on the contrary, it should be 'the main, if not only, topic of our resolutions'. He was critical of those who boasted – as the prime minister had done – that the Spanish Parliament had held more sessions than any other European country since the war **broke out**, when in reality the legislative body's resolutions proved to be of 'such indifference, such futility, such obliviousness' as to bring shame on parliamentary members and the executive branch. The governments of other nations – including the neutral countries, whom Spain was keeping a close eye on – had involved the legislative branch, even if only to grant the government with the extraordinary powers needed to urgently adopt special measures. The Spanish government, however, did no such thing, and it had instead opted for a stance of total political and economic ineptitude. Cambó was appalled at the fact that almost three months had passed since sessions had started **up again**, yet nothing had changed in the Parliament's agenda: there were still items addressing the approval of a budget that had been drawn up before war broke out and that had not been touched since. Only two unofficial notes had hinted that the council of ministers was working on projects regarding the economy and national defence, but none of these plans had been the subject of parliamentary debate. The Catalan deputy felt that this global emergency should be used as a catalyst for the creation of a true national government, one that would represent the collective consciousness of the entire country under the banner of a 'holy patriotic union'. In contrast, the government had been lingering in a state of 'prejudice, separation and divorce' when dealing with Parliament, choosing to keep it in the dark about everything. Not only did this contribute to

<sup>32</sup> *DSC*, 5 November 1914, n. 78, pp. 2184–5.

<sup>33</sup> *GM*, 24 November 1914, n. 328, pp. 523–7.

<sup>34</sup> *Relaciones entre el Parlamento y el Gobierno frente a los problemas economicos que plantea en España la actual conflagracion europea*, in *DSC*, 12 December 1914, n. 107, pp. 3263–75; *DSC*, 14 December 1914, n. 108, pp. 3298–306; *DSC*, 15 December 1914, pp. 3334–5.

debasing the role of the country's legislative arm, it also weakened the authority of the government itself.

Thus, an all-out war was being waged within the institutions as well, evidenced in part by the bombastic rhetoric that was being employed. The 'worldwide outbreak of hostilities' forced the Spanish government to 'arm' itself with the means needed to face the consequences 'valiantly' and 'victoriously', and Parliament would have to grant 'sweeping authorization' in the name of national solidarity. Failure to do so would take the hope of a 'national rebuilding' and turn it into 'national disintegration' brought on by the clash between political parties and between conflicting local interests.<sup>35</sup> The institutional concerns raised by Cambó would go unanswered; Dato shifted the chamber's attention to the issue of setting up free ports in Cadiz and Barcelona, and the topic would not be brought up again.

The Great War was brought to the attention of the Upper House for the first time on 1 February 1915, by the liberal senator Juan Navarro Reverter. He submitted a formal question to the prime minister in which he expressed his hope for 'an extensive debate on the situation that had arisen in the country because of this international conflict that has afflicted all of us'.<sup>36</sup> Navarro endorsed the government's decision to remain neutral, and he even approved of the fact that the government had proclaimed as much without consulting with the *Cortes* or with the main political figures in the country. Nevertheless, he did not want to be construed as giving up his 'terrible habit of thinking', nor was he surrendering Parliament's right to consider the measures needed to address the damage caused by the war. One only had to look at the other neutral countries, where Parliaments had changed their own legislation and had authorized stronger state interventionism in economic affairs. That was not the case in Spain, where weak – if not contradictory – measures had been implemented in matters concerning imports and exports, bank lending and public works.<sup>37</sup>

Prime Minister Dato once again stated the reasons for going the way of neutrality and for doing so without resorting to consultation beforehand. In his view, consulting with the legislative body would have only been good for 'scaremongering, if not spreading downright panic, and that is what, more than anything else, would have led to the nation's immediate economic ruin'. He continued by saying that politics has a short memory, and one is quick to forget 'the seriousness of past events', not to mention 'the difficulties the nation must struggle with in order to maintain a state of normalcy'.<sup>38</sup>

It is this last observation that offers the key to interpreting the patriotic discourse that the Spanish government called for in those frantic months. Instead of launching an effort to strengthen the nation's institutions, the government held on to this overriding image of a country that had to be kept under special

<sup>35</sup> *DSC*, 12 December 1914, n. 107, pp. 3263–8.

<sup>36</sup> *DSS*, 1 February 1915, n. 132, pp. 2093–4.

<sup>37</sup> *DSS*, 2 February 1915, n. 133, pp. 2102–13.

<sup>38</sup> *DSS*, 3 February 1915, n. 134, pp. 2120–8, taken from the speech delivered by Prime Minister Dato.

control, because riots, revolts and chaos represented an endemic risk.<sup>39</sup> It was for this reason that any attempt to build a relationship of trust on equal terms with the legislative branch was destined to founder. Dato's speeches to the congress of deputies in November 1914 and to the senate in February 1915 would lay the groundwork for defining Spain's balance of power during the war. They even became the official documents on the subject of 'the Spanish government's proclamation of neutrality in response to the ongoing war' and 'the situation that has arisen in Spain due to the European war', which were sent to all of the kingdom's representatives abroad for their information and as instructions for them to follow.<sup>40</sup>

By appealing to the legislative branch's sense of patriotism, the executive branch sought to justify its exclusion of Parliament from the decision-making process. Such a justification was necessary lest they reawaken that destructive power which in the past had brought Spain to its knees under the yoke of political and social disorder. The fact that the Spanish government resorted to this kind of rhetoric showed a marked departure from the institutional dynamics playing out in other European parliaments at the time. As Cambó and Navarro pointed out, the fears raised by the Great War were not being used to reaffirm Parliament's active and conscious support of government action; on the contrary, they were being used to marginalize Parliament's contributions, thereby speeding up the de-legitimization of the entire system. Furthermore, this type of rhetoric was beginning to show all the signs of wearing thin with age and becoming that much more ineffective. This was no longer the *Cortes* of 1876, when tangible fears could be used as leverage; in terms of both age and political experience, the parliamentary members during the Great War were far removed from the dramatic events of the *Sexenio*<sup>41</sup> and the military *pronunciamientos* (a form of military coup d'état) of the previous century.<sup>42</sup> Social peace in Spain was facing distinctly different threats in the early 1900s, and as such required new solutions.

The government's stance on the *Cortes* ended up bringing together both conservative and liberal prime ministers. In October 1916, Marcelino Domingo Sanjuan, deputy of the republican minority, directed a question to the prime minister at the time, the liberal Count of Romanones. He asked to discuss Spain's decision on neutrality, and to do so 'for the sake of Parliament's respectability, for the sake of national dignity' and in order to prevent 'these so-called patriotic silences' from

<sup>39</sup>The use of this kind of rhetoric was quite well known. See M. Aglietti, *Cortes, nazione e cittadinanza. Immaginario e rappresentazione delle istituzioni politiche nella Spagna della Restauracion (1874-1900)*, (Bologna, 2011), pp. 123-36.

<sup>40</sup>AHN, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, H3147, unnumbered insert, *Correspondencia ministerios, Senado y Congreso, Circulares y otros documentos - 1914 - Guerra Europea*, circular letters containing royal orders from 7 November 1914 and from 3 February 1915.

<sup>41</sup>This term refers to a six-year period of democratic revolution, starting with the revolution of 1868 and ending with the coup d'état of 1874, which restored the Bourbon monarchy under Alfonso XII. It was a turbulent period that coincided with the First Spanish Republic, which was based on the progressive, democratic constitution of 1869.

<sup>42</sup>A comprehensive analysis of the social-professional profiles of the deputies who served in this period can be found in F. Del Rey Reguillo and J. Moreno Luzón, 'Semblanza de la élite parlamentaria en la crisis de la Restauración (1914-1923)', *Revista de Estudios Políticos* 93, (1996), pp. 177-201.

turning into ‘patriotic error, humiliation and shame’.<sup>43</sup> Romanones responded that his predecessor, Dato, had deemed such a debate unnecessary, since the *Cortes* had been of the opinion that ‘the most patriotic thing was to . . . keep silent and place their complete and total trust’ in the government. He went on to say that unless that was no longer the *Cortes*’ stance on the issue, then there was no reason to change approaches. In any case, if Domingo was prepared to take responsibility for the ‘many risks’ that came with discussing the issue, then the government would be willing to do so. The matter ended there but, in reflecting on the episode years later, Romanones would reveal just how inherently dangerous the issue had been: because of ‘the way things stood’ at the time, had they opened a debate on Spain’s neutrality and possibly considered aligning themselves with the allied powers, ‘it would have become impossible for the *Cortes* to function properly, and it would have undoubtedly led to the fall of the government’.<sup>44</sup>

The months went by and the war raged on, taking an ever-heavier toll on the countries involved. 1917 was the *annus horribilis* for the Spanish *Cortes*, as it would set a record for the lowest number of sessions held. There had been 122 sessions in 1916, and there would be 109 in 1918, but in 1917 a mere 22 sessions were held in the months of January and February: for the next 12 months, all sessions were suspended. Nevertheless, it was in one of those sessions in February 1917 that deputy Cambó once again brought up the issue of the anomalous Spanish situation ‘with regard to foreign problems’. He was able to acutely capture the impasse that the legislative body had found itself grappling with in the name of that mistaken sense of patriotism:

There is not a single man among us who does not want the government to have the utmost power and authority, no matter who is heading it, as the government represents Spain to the world . . . But honorable members, perhaps it is we who are different from the rest of the world? Is the Spanish parliament not the equal of other parliaments? Perhaps patriotism in Spain cannot be expressed in any other way except through silence?<sup>45</sup>

The war would again be a topic of debate in November of 1918. As coincidence would have it, news of the armistice marking Germany’s surrender broke on the same day that a new government was to be appointed. The session was presided over by Manuel García Prieto, who was standing in for the outgoing Prime Minister Maura. Even before the regular session commenced, some deputies had submitted a pair of ‘proposiciones’ in which two statements that had been drawn up to express joy over the end of the war were to be put to a vote before the lower house. The texts were similar in their intent, yet different in the way in which the said joy was to be worded. The congress of deputies and the government were thus faced with the urgent need to discuss the issue and decide whether and how to align themselves, albeit at the end of the war.

<sup>43</sup>*DSC*, 13 October 1916, n. 66, p. 1798.

<sup>44</sup>Conde de Romanones, *Notas de una vida (1912–1931)* (Madrid, 1947), vol. III, p. 107.

<sup>45</sup>*DSC*, 17 February 1917, n. 18, p. 507.

The first statement was presented by José Manuel Pedregal and it had been signed by seven deputies (mostly exponents of the *Partido Reformista*, which was cut from the mould of the liberal democrats and the republicans). It proposed sending ‘the most heartfelt and enthusiastic congratulations’ to the Parliaments of the allied powers, all the more so in light of the victory ‘for law, liberty and democracy’, which was ‘so closely tied to the future of Spain’.<sup>46</sup> The other statement was presented by Manuel González Hontoria and signed by another seven liberal deputies, almost all of whom identified with the liberal faction of Romanones.<sup>47</sup> This text limited itself to joining in the general jubilation surrounding the end of the war and the fact that justice once again reigned over force. The government – which at the time included Romanones as minister of state – subscribed to the latter proposition, because, as García Prieto claimed, it was more representative of the country’s general mood. A debate flared up on the floor of the lower house and Pedregal defended the document he had presented, claiming that it was in Spain’s best interests to subscribe to it. It would show that Spain possessed the same values as the victorious powers, including those values of a political and institutional nature. It was time for them to recognize their own kind; in other words, to recognize ‘the Parliaments of the allied powers, so that we ourselves can be considered a deliberative Parliament’. In this way, Spain could reclaim its place among the group of European Parliaments that stood for the ‘ideals of liberty, law and democracy’.<sup>48</sup>

In short, there were two conflicting visions of the legislative branch’s role: one was intent on strengthening the Parliament’s role by drawing inspiration from the new democracies in Europe; the other continued to tread the path of tradition, which granted the executive branch any and all decision-making power and justified it by appealing to the need for unanimity to protect against the risk of partisan divisions. In the end, the course of action proposed by González Hontoria would prevail, as he reasserted his view that Parliament would do best to distance itself from taking a stance in favour of one side or another, even if the war was over:

We disagree [with the proposal of Sr Pedregal] for two reasons: first of all, because we believe that it is incumbent upon the government alone to take any initiative and bear all responsibility as far as foreign policy is concerned . . . . Secondly, because we are not here to divide; indeed we have proposed doing just the opposite, inviting everyone to set aside their criticism, first and foremost that criticism which we too once supported in the past. But what do you think? That we do not have a clear position on the international politics of Spain? . . . .

In defending this stance, I have deliberately ignored all that has been thought and said during the war; I wanted to have you forget whether the facts confirmed or

<sup>46</sup>*DSC*, 12 November 1918, n. 92, p. 2979. This text was signed by José Manuel Pedregal, Juan Uña Sartou, Leopoldo Romeo, Ramón Álvarez Valdés, José Llarín Areny, Vicente Álvarez Villamil and Pablo de Azcàrate.

<sup>47</sup>*DSC*, 12 November 1918, n. 92, p. 2979. The document was signed by Manuel González Hontoria, José Morote, Leopoldo Romeo, Eduardo Ortega y Gasset, Joaquín Salvatella, Mateo Azpeitia and José Abril y Ochoa.

<sup>48</sup>*DSC*, 12 November 1918, n. 92, p. 2979.

contradicted the predictions each of you had made; in fact, what I really wanted was for us to unanimously look toward the future.<sup>49</sup>

The senate also witnessed a similar clash between the two ways of viewing Parliament's task as an institution, and the outcome was no different. It was clear to everyone that the world had changed, and that the end of the war had ushered in a new era for modern nations which would see a 'total overhaul of all values, not just on an economic level, but on a social and political level as well'. Nonetheless, if Parliament wanted to find itself on an equal footing with the other powers, then its task would not be so much to set the country on the path to reform – which, on the contrary, would have divided the nation – but more to buttress the respectability and authority of the government, and to offer up its unanimous support as a guard against political partisanship (or *partidismos*).<sup>50</sup> As was the case in the lower house, the senate held a brief debate on the motion which would formalize Spain's joy over the end of the war. In particular, there was a dispute over the opportuneness of including a phrase that had been proposed by the senator Amalio Gimeno y Cabañas, in which reference was made to the 'triumph of justice and law over war'. This wording was deemed by some to be too one-sided; in the end, it would be the opinion of Joaquín Sanchez de Toca that prevailed, as he stated that 'in international matters, the only voice of the people should be that of their own government'. And with that declaration, he left any further issues in the hands of García Prieto, to the unanimous support of the upper house.<sup>51</sup>

Nothing was left unscripted, however, when the signing of the Treaty of Versailles was announced to the *Cortes*: this time, the government was one step ahead of Parliament. Over the course of the weekend between the signing of the treaty and the first possible day to announce the event (the following Monday, 1 July 1919), the government arranged for the speeches to be given with the presidents of the two houses. In this way, deputies and senators simultaneously received news of both the treaty and the words of congratulations that Madrid had already sent out to the allied governments. The President of the Senate, Manuel Allende-salazar, called on those present to subscribe to the government's initiative without drawing up a text of their own, and to entrust the government with the task of communicating its congratulations to the upper houses of the allied powers. The proposal was put to a vote without debate, as it was a topic on which 'nothing more was to be said, because this is a moment that calls more for listening than for singing songs of celebration, be they poetic or not'.<sup>52</sup> Acting in his then role as minister of state, González Hontoria once again asserted that it would be opportune for the senate to limit itself to 'backing the president's proposal as a sign of Spain's firmness in its international stance, and to show that no matter what our internal divisions may be, when dealing with foreign affairs we will always be able to

<sup>49</sup>*DSC*, 12 November 1918, n. 92, p. 2980.

<sup>50</sup>This is taken from the speech by Senator Sanchez de Toca, *DSS*, 12 November 1918, n. 90, pp. 1555–6.

<sup>51</sup>*DSS*, 13 November 1918, n. 91, pp. 1563–6.

<sup>52</sup>*DSS*, 1 July 1919, n. 6, p. 55.



unite all of our efforts into one, on behalf and for the love of Spain'.<sup>53</sup> The senate warmly approved the proposal.

At the same time, the government's announcement was delivered by Marquis de Figueroa, president of the lower house. In doing so, he called for a unanimous expression of jubilation to be sent to the Parliaments of the allied powers. On this occasion, he made no mention of delegating this task to the government, but the prime minister would see to that personally when he spoke to the deputies immediately afterwards. In anticipation of potential objections that might be raised, Antonio Maura opened his speech by describing how the government had already expressed 'its sentiment, which it believes is in line with that of the nation', and that it had done so without consulting with the houses because they had been closed for their weekly recess. He then stated that the government would gladly take it upon itself to pass on the lower house's message as proposed by de Figueroa, which amounted to presenting it to the house as a *fait accompli*. Thus, the house approved the motion without debate; only the socialist minority abstained, not because they disagreed with the how the motion was carried but because of other specific issues.<sup>54</sup>

Once again, the government had exploited patriotism as a way of limiting the Parliament's right to take initiatives and exert some degree of control over the country's affairs. Not only that, it had also used patriotism to assign itself the task of embodying the spirit of the nation; a responsibility that would have been fair to expect from the country's representative body. While the government may have respected convention, as evidenced by its seeking out the support of the presidents of the two houses, the procedure put in place by Maura relegated the legislative branch to a secondary role and doomed parliamentary members to silence. This is because any opposition voices would have been reduced to a futile exercise of rhetoric, which would be seen as contradictory to the strong and unified image that Spain wanted to project to the world.

#### HOW A NEUTRAL COUNTRY WAS DEFEATED BY THE GREAT WAR

An inherent consequence of dealing with an emergency situation was the consolidation of executive powers. It went hand in hand with the expectation that the legislative branch would offer its unconditional support – a solid foundation built on a spirit of patriotism, though not without some moralizing as well – and that this was to galvanize the country's institutions in the face of the dangers of war. But in Spain, however, things became complicated.

The government in Madrid opted not to formally declare a state of emergency. On the contrary, despite the need to implement all kinds of measures in order to address the most pernicious of the war's effects, a regime of 'normalcy' was officially maintained. Above all, this included the government's stance on the *Cortes*, because it feared that any admission of crisis would lead to even worse turmoil and to a definitive loss of control over the country. It was no coincidence that

<sup>53</sup> *DSS*, 1 July 1919, n. 6, p. 55.

<sup>54</sup> See the speech by Indalecio Prieto, *DSC*, 1 July 1919, n. 4, pp. 74–5.

the first ‘special law’ – the *Ley dotando al Poder público de facultades indispensables para garantizar la neutralidad de España* – was not submitted for parliamentary approval until July 1918.<sup>55</sup> Germany, Britain, France and others had been intervening in and influencing Spain’s delicate economic, political and social balance in ways that were not always so evident. A saturation point had been reached and the time had come to adopt appropriate countermeasures, even if it meant admitting to the Parliament and to the nation that the situation had become difficult to keep under control. It was obviously a late response to the problem. At that point, the executive branch’s authority had been significantly undermined because of the position it had taken on the legislative arm of government. The latter had been excluded from participating in the management of national and international politics, and, as such, it was impossible to achieve that institutional symbiosis that President Poincaré of France had happily christened ‘union sacrée’.<sup>56</sup> And all of this was taking place immediately after the *Cortes* had opened up a serious debate on how to evolve in order to take on a more effective role of political representation, demonstrating a level of dynamism that it had perhaps never shown before.<sup>57</sup>

The process was anything but straightforward and it can certainly not be reduced to simplistic arguments and counter-arguments. Even after the turning point of 1917,<sup>58</sup> and the arrival of the ‘gobierno nacional’<sup>59</sup> headed by Maura in March 1918, there were several occasions where the premiership actually highlighted the value of establishing parliamentary trust and being recognized as a government that was ‘ordained by the authority and respectability of Parliament’; the purpose of such a government was ‘only to fulfill the Parliament’s wishes and abide by its mandate’.<sup>60</sup> Many of the measures put into place were formally justified as attempts to strengthen the functioning of the legislative body. A famous example in that regard is Maura’s ‘cry of love to Parliament’, which he delivered to the lower house during a session held to reform the rules of procedure for the congress of deputies. Maura’s aim was a new set of rules that would protect the legislative branch from falling victim to the abuse of obstructionist tactics and government decrees. The introduction of a so-called ‘guillotine’ mechanism (which would allow for an issue to be put to a vote without the possibility of proposing amendments or holding a debate, should the government or seven deputies request as much) was interpreted by some as an attack on Parliament’s power to take the initiative, but Maura contested those accusations. Maura sought to justify the usefulness of such a mechanism by pointing to the ineptitude of a party system.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup>*GM*, 4 July 1918, n. 185, pp. 21–2.

<sup>56</sup>For further details, see J.F.V. Keiger, *Raymond Poincaré* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 188–207.

<sup>57</sup>M. Martorell and F. del Rey, ‘El parlamentarismo liberal y sus impugnadores’, *Ayer* 63, (2006), pp. 23–53, in particular p. 40.

<sup>58</sup>Romero Salvadó, *España 1914–1918*, pp. 159–76.

<sup>59</sup>The ‘gobierno nacional’ was an extraordinary coalition between the main parties in Parliament that, for the first time, gave rise to a new composition of government. Namely, it was no longer a government made up of one of the two parties (the liberals or the conservatives) ‘taking turns’ in power, but rather one that included exponents from minority parties as well.

<sup>60</sup>From the speech by Antonio Maura, in *DSC*, 8 April 1918, n. 12, p. 242.

<sup>61</sup>See Cabrera, ‘La reforma’, pp. 348–51.

He was convinced that the legislative branch had to be reformed in order that it could become an institution that was befitting and worthy of the new world that had emerged from the ashes of the Great War.<sup>62</sup>

Though doggedly pursued, the efforts to overhaul the institutional framework did not work out as envisaged. It should be noted that a fair share of the Spanish ruling elite was afraid of a genuine democratic upheaval, and this played an important role in hindering any potential reform. There was explicit reference in many speeches to the fact that, as far as Spain was concerned, the war had not triggered any process of institutional reform, nor had it led to achieving a 'patriotic union' of political forces. There were varying opinions that sought to explain such an unwelcome outcome, though they all returned to the usual flaws of national politics. Eloy Bullón y Fernández, a liberal conservative deputy, accused the Maura government and its anxious reformists of 'breaking this sacred union of peace while at the same time other countries are forming a sacred union against the war'. The result was a worsening of the already existing rifts between parliamentary groups, instead of moving forward 'by uniting progress with tradition and freedom with order, which was the country's main protection against revolutionary movements'.<sup>63</sup> The republican deputy Marcelino Domingo evoked the image of a 'sacred union' between the government and Parliament as a consequence of the war, while in Spain they had resorted to censorship and the suspension of constitutionally guaranteed rights in order to protect the partisan interests of a select few, to the detriment of the majority. Domingo compared this to the time when conservative groups in Parliament had defeated Minister Alba's economic plan regarding war profits.<sup>64</sup> The socialist Indalecio Prieto was even more drastic in his assessment of the sweeping political and social changes arising from the war. After pointing out to his fellow left-leaning parliamentary members that they had chosen to make themselves prisoners to a right-leaning government, Prieto proceeded to say that while the aforementioned changes would drive progress in other countries, in Spain they had the potential – 'given the particular characteristics of the Spanish race' – to turn into 'some archaic and unchecked energy, which would lead to the country's ruin or to its subjection to a foreign power'.<sup>65</sup> In short, Spain was being portrayed as a nation that had come out on the losing side of the war.

The most evocative, and in some ways the most prophetic, interpretation of Spain's predicament was delivered by the Count of Romanones during his inaugural address for the 1918–19 academic year at the University of Madrid. The party system was in a state of crisis, and this had been recognized as a crucial part of

<sup>62</sup>Maura had the following to say during one of the crucial sessions for the approval of the new rules of procedure: 'We aim and aspire to strengthen the dignity of Parliament, to speed up its procedures, in order that it can respond to the needs of an increasingly complex modern world that is changing faster and faster', in *DSC*, 8 April 1918, n. 12, p. 241.

<sup>63</sup>Bullón y Fernández used these words to oppose the reform proposed for the lower house's rules of procedure, in *DSC*, 26 April 1918, n. 28, p. 667.

<sup>64</sup>*DSC*, 31 May 1918, n. 47, p. 1302. On the importance of this reform, which was proposed by the liberal minister Santiago Alba but never came to fruition, see M. Martorell Linares, *El santo temor al déficit. Política y Hacienda en la Restauración* (Madrid, 2000).

<sup>65</sup>*DSC*, 23 April 1918, n. 25, p. 602.

public life in all European countries. Its origins lay in the fact that political parties had degenerated into nothing more than a tool for holding onto power. Then the war came along, and its violent eruption forced the politics of the countries involved to find a 'true national goal', while doing away with 'all those means masquerading as ends'. This formed the basis for the idea of a 'union sagrada', in which the fighting among political factions would be suspended and Spanish governments would collaborate with the nation's representatives. In Romanones' opinion, this was not simply the ephemeral fruit of patriotic fervour, but rather the indisputable, concrete effect of profound change. 'The national goal' for the belligerent powers had become to win the war, while the goal of the neutral countries was limited to maintaining their status and 'saving themselves from ruin'. Thus, on the one hand there were the nations that acted with a view to the present and the future, in pursuit of victory; on the other hand, there were the neutral countries, such as Spain, who 'were so anxious to steer clear of suffering at all costs that they only looked at the present', and sacrificed their future to the present in doing so. In the wake of this short-sightedness, the old party-based system was crumbling in a process that had been accelerated by the war, while the urge to push through reforms had not been strong enough to resolve the age-old problems that needed addressing. The war would eventually come to an end, and Spain would have to come to terms with a political regime that at that point would be unsuitable for the new historical context that had emerged, and unable to offer any government solutions.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, that very situation would shortly come to pass.

#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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<sup>66</sup>*Influencia de la guerra en la transformación de los partidos políticos y en la composición de los Gobiernos. Discurso pronunciado por el Exc.mo Sr. Conde de Romanones, presidente del Ateneo de Madrid, el día 18 de enero de 1919, en la sesión inaugural del curso de 1918–1919* (Madrid, 1919), pp. 27–35.