

THE CATALAN PARLIAMENT (I). A HISTORICAL REPORT

THE CATALANS' GREAT LOVE OF FREEDOM AND THEIR PASSIONATE DEFENCE OF THEIR COUNTRY'S TRADITIONS LED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLIES FROM THE END OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY ONWARDS.

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The Catalans' great love of freedom and their passionate defence of their country's traditions led to the establishment of representative assemblies from the end of the twelfth century onwards. Institutions of self-government, with the Golden Age of the *Corts* at the end of the fourteenth century, existed in Catalonia up to 1714, when all national political representation was suppressed. But these earlier bodies are simply distant forerunners of the present *Parlament de Catalunya*.

In the mid-nineteenth century, with the *Renaixença*, a growing nationalist movement got under way, which led various political groups to put forward suggestions for the recuperation of the institutions of self-government. Though an early form of self-organization was achieved in 1914, the *Mancomunitat de Catalunya*, which was limited to administrative activities, there was no real independent political power until the arrival of the republic.



On 14 April 1931, Francesc Macià proclaimed the Catalan republic in Barcelona, hours before the Spanish republic was proclaimed in Madrid. This new Catalan government later took the name of *Generalitat de Catalunya* in memory of the ancient institution that had represented independent power, and it was agreed that a statute would establish the legality of Catalan political autonomy, presumably within the framework of a federation. However, the second Spanish republic's constitution established a different formula, the "integral state", with a possible statute of autonomy for certain regions. The *Estatut d'Autonomia* received its prebiscite in Catalonia on 2 August 1931 and was announced officially by the president of the republic on 15 September 1932. In it were laid down the guidelines of Catalan self-government and the structure of the political institutions of the new *Generalitat*: the parliament, the president and his government and the court of appeal.



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The Catalan parliament, elected on 20 November 1932, held its constituent sitting on 6 December.

In that first parliament, made up of eighty-five deputies, there were three political groups: *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, the dominant force, with 61 deputies; *Lliga Catalana*, with 15; *Unió Socialista de Catalunya*, with 5, and others of differing ideologies. There was only one legislative period of the *Parlament de Catalunya*, during which there were 259 sittings, 122 laws were passed, and two presidents of the *Generalitat* and three presidents of the *Parlament* were chosen. There were five different governments, although *Esquerra Republicana* had the majority in all of them. However, the complex political life of the Spanish republic led to a period when the *Estatut* and the *Parlament* were suspended (from 6 October 1934 to 29 February 1936) and it was impossible to renew them in 1937 because of the war. During this period it only held 5 sittings, the last being on 1 October 1938.

General Franco, rebelling against the government and the constitutional regime, abolished the *Estatut* and the institutions of self-government in October 1938, even before his army had invaded Catalonia and won the war.

The political regime he imposed persecuted working-class and democratic movements everywhere and in Catalonia and the Basque Country the nationalist ones as well. The nationalist demands gradually increased during the years of

the Franco regime and the slogan of the *Assemblea de Catalunya, Llibertat, Amnistia i Estatut d'Autonomia* (Freedom, Amnesty and Statute of Autonomy) was a unanimous demand after the restoration of the monarchy. The first democratic elections meant the provisional restoration of the *Generalitat*, personified by its president, Josep Tarradellas, who had just returned from exile.

The Spanish constitution of 27 December 1978, in its second article, recognizes the right of the Spanish "nationalities" to autonomy. The drawing up of the *Estatut de Catalunya* had been started in June 1977 and went on alongside that of the constitution; it was approved by the people of Catalonia in a referendum on 25 October 1979 and ratified by King Juan Carlos I on 18 December of the same year.

On 20 March 1980, the first elections to the Catalan parliament were held and the opening session took place on 10 April, when a presiding committee was elected, headed by the Right Honourable Senyor Herrerbert Barrera. On 24 April the Right Honourable Senyor Jordi Pujol was elected president of the *Generalitat* and the government he proposed took power. During the first legislative session, the parliamentary groups present were: *Convergència i Unió*, with 43 deputies; Socialists, with 33; Communists with 23 (later reduced to 20); the Centre party, with 18 (later reduced to 8); *Esquerra Republicana*, with 14 (later reduced to 13); the Andalusians, with 2 (later dissolved) and

the Mixed Group (independents and minor parties), with a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 16 deputies.

During this first period, the parliament held 76 sittings and passed 78 laws, 150 resolutions and 82 proposals.

On 5 March 1984, elections were called to form a new parliament. Polling took place on 29 April 1984.

On 17 May the opening session of the second parliament was held and the Right Honourable Senyor Miquel Coll i Alentorn was elected president of the parliament. On 30 May, the Right Honourable Senyor Jordi Pujol was once again invested as president of the *Generalitat*.

During this second parliament, the constituent parties were: *Convergència i Unió*, with 72 deputies; Socialists, with 41; Conservatives, with 11 (later reduced to 8); Communists, with 6; *Esquerra Republicana*, with 5, and the Mixed Group, with 3. In the first three years of this legislative period, the parliament held 70 sittings and passed 56 laws, 121 resolutions and 25 proposals.

The *Parlament de Catalunya* fulfills the functions of a representative body along the lines of western parliamentary democracies. Its organization and working is similar to that of the *Landtägs* in Germany or the *Consiglio* of the Italian regions. Its powers, defined in the *Estatut d'Autonomia de Catalunya*, fall between those that correspond to the state parliaments in a federation and those exercised by the parliaments of the autonomous regions. ●