

Amadeo I: The Republican King?

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Abdication, n.:

[1.] An act whereby a sovereign attests his sense of the high temperature of the throne.

[2.] The voluntary renunciation of that of which one has previously been deprived by force. The giving up of a throne for the purpose of enjoying the discomfiture of a successor. For these several definitions we are indebted to Spanish history.¹

Introduction

The North American journalist Ambrose Bierce published the successive entries of his biting *The Devil's Dictionary* in a variety of newspapers between 1881 and 1906. Although the words that introduce this chapter appear on the very first pages of the book thanks to pure alphabetical logic, they must have been amongst the last to be written. The first meaning for the term 'abdication', in fact, was explicitly dedicated to the death of the former queen of Spain, Isabel II, which occurred in Paris in 1904. Bierce later wrote the second meaning, which does not appear in all the editions of the book. Here, he did not only allude to only 'poor Isabel', but also condensed a conspicuously recurrent tradition in recent Spanish history in a single satirical definition. At that time, the latest Spanish king to carry on the tradition was the successor to Isabel II, Amadeo I of Savoy, although technically speaking, the duke of Aosta never abdicated. According to the Constitution of 1869, that required an uncomfortable parliamentary procedure. Amadeo I simply renounced the Crown, leaving the way open for the proclamation of the First Spanish Republic.

In his definitions, Bierce correctly and ingeniously synthesised the reasons for both the fall of Isabel II and Amadeo I's abdication. In 1868, a military uprising accompanied by an intense popular mobilisation toppled the queen from the throne that she had occupied since 1843. The rebellion brought together various republican, democratic and liberal political forces. They had little in common, beyond being excluded from power and their opposition to the reactionary drift directed by Isabel during the 1860s.² In fact, the doctrinaire liberal regime grounded in the Constitution of 1845 had tilted towards authoritarian positions with elements that even set their sights on a restoration of absolutism.³ The 1868 revolutionary process resulted in a radical departure from the previous political landscape and, in Spain, an unprecedented situation of rights and liberties unfolded.⁴ This opening allowed a broad process of democratisation to develop that inevitably involved the redefinition – or elimination – of the institution of the monarchy.⁵

Between 1868, when a coalition of conservative and progressive liberals took control of

¹ Bierce, 2000: 6.

² Fuente Monge, 2000.

³ Burdiel, 2010: 728–230. Marcuello, 1998: 15–36.

⁴ Jover Zamora, 1991: 62–63.

⁵ Fuente and Serrano, 2005: 26–27.

the provisional government, and the restoration of the Bourbons in 1874, Spain witnessed successive variations of democracy. In 1869, the constituent assembly, or Cortes, was elected by universal male suffrage. The new constitution adopted in June of that year has been characterised by part of the historiography as one of somewhat hasty democratic rule.⁶ It combined a clear affirmation of individual rights with a configuration of the monarchy that undercut these democratic principles, by granting the king the prerogative to appoint the government, dissolve the Cortes and enact laws.⁷ Nonetheless, never before in Spain had the monarch's powers been so limited by representative bodies, and never had individual rights been affirmed so forcefully. In this respect, the Constitution of 1869 represented a clear step forward in the parliamentarisation of the monarchy. Proof of this was the fact that in late 1870, the Cortes themselves elected the son of Vittorio Emmanuele I of Italy, Amadeo of Savoy, king. He would reign for little more than two years, until February 1873.

The Duke of Aosta's 'voluntary renunciation' of the crown was, in fact, very much linked to the high temperature of his throne. Many of his supporters, especially those from the Progressive Party, had become convinced of the incompatibility of monarchy and democracy.⁸ For that reason, some of them embraced republicanism in order to safeguard individual rights, while others simply opted to abandon democratic principles. Of course, for the republican movement, which had logically always been opposed to putting Amadeo I on the throne, the failure of this trial democratic monarchy was confirmation of the incompatibility of the principles that they had never stopped postulating. However, the case of a monarch spontaneously renouncing his prerogatives, invoking the good of the nation and opening the door to a republic could be seen as an example of republican virtue. This was the image that they would later cultivate in their construction of a memory of the Italian monarch quite at odds with what they had projected during his reign. This chapter examines both perspectives in order to better understand the first attempt to establish a democratic monarchy in a European state.

Prisoner of the Radical Party

A few days after Amadeo I declared his renunciation of the throne, the British ambassador in Madrid, Austen Henry Layard, sent the Foreign Office a lengthy report in which he tried to explain 'the principal events which have occurred since the arrival of the King in Spain, and which have [...] led to his abdication of the crown'.⁹ Layard was not surprised by the monarch's decision. In fact, he had already foreseen this possibility in May 1871, scarcely five months after Amadeo of Savoy arrived in Spain.¹⁰ In his opinion, it was necessary to search for the root of the failure of the democratic monarchy in the dysfunctional party system. During the final phase of his reign, Amadeo had definitively lost the support of the conservative liberals in the Constitutional Party. Moreover, according to the ambassador's interpretation, the king 'was virtually the prisoner of the radical party, and he felt that nothing could free him but a *coup d'état*'.¹¹ The same sources claimed that the Italian monarch considered this solution, until he concluded that it was equally dangerous for his throne. He was between a rock and a hard place.

⁶ See Serván, 2004.

⁷ Calero, 1987: XVII and XIX. Varela Suanzes-Carpegna, 2006: 210–228.

⁸ Higuera Castañeda, 2019: 39–62.

⁹ *Public Record Office. Foreign Office (PRO. FO). 72–1337. Classified report No. 99, 17-02-1873.*

¹⁰ PRO. FO. 72-1275. Report No. 141, 27-05-1871.

¹¹ PRO. FO. C72-1337. Classified report, No. 99, 17-02-1873.

The prison to which Layard was referring was, on the one hand, the broad majority enjoyed by the Radical Party in the Cortes after its stunning victory in the August 1872 election. On the other hand, it was related to the conceptions about the monarchy that characterised this political party, which can be summarised as an attempt to complete the full parliamentarisation of the institution of monarchy, underscoring the Crown's subordination to national sovereignty and, by extension, the supremacy of individual rights. This meant pushing the monarchy into an inactive political space. One radical deputy, Miguel Mathet, expressed this plainly at a meeting held in Madrid in early 1872: 'we have committed ourselves to reconciling two incompatible things: democracy and certain essential attributes'.¹² Despite the fact that the radicals comprised the largest group in the congress, the king entrusted the conservatives with forming a government. For the radicals, the king, whether consciously or unconsciously, had broken parliamentary rules by depriving them of the government.

At the same meeting, former minister José Echegaray drew the most ovations from the more than 10,000 attendees at the event. The press called attention to the 'thundering applause' that interrupted his speech when he decried the palace influences undermining the king's arbitrational role in the constitutional system:

The Radical Party is not the party of palace sycophants, of court parasites; for two years, the September revolution kept the doors and windows and balconies of the Palace of the East open, so that the revolutionary hurricane could enter the royal palace [...] and purify that atmosphere; and tear down the floors and walls and ceilings and take away so much rot and so much misery of adulations and lies and courtly treachery that the Bourbon dynasty had left there [...] Today, we sadly see that the Palace of the East had not been sufficiently aired out.¹³

Echegaray's words caused a huge stir. Initially, they led to an interpretation that the new dynasty, summoned to symbolize the regeneration of the country, was no less corrupt than the previous one. Another important leader, Cristino Martos, warned the king:

May God protect you, sir, that the efforts of democracy do not become sterile; we support the dynasty, but we believe that the monarchy cannot and should not separate its cause from the cause of democracy.¹⁴

Far from being anecdotal or isolated, this type of appeal to the king was common in radical newspapers. In this regard, the British ambassador interpreted that the Radical Party

turned upon the King the cause of the exclusion of the liberal party from power. There was no insult nor calumny that they spared to discredit the king in public opinion, and unhappily with too much success.¹⁵

Layard was either exaggerating or simply interpreted that any line of questioning regarding the monarch's use of his prerogatives amounted to an offense against the institution that he represented.

¹² *La Nación*, 04-02-1872.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ PRO. FO. 72-1337. Classified report, No. 99, 17-02-1873.

Of course, this did not take into account the fact that the radical governments led by Manuel Ruiz Zorrilla had made the greatest effort to popularise the king's image. The trips that took the monarch to the various Spanish provinces in the summers of 1871 and 1872 provide eloquent proof of this.¹⁶ The aim was to allow the Savoy monarchy to mix with the people and, by that means, reconstruct the Spanish national identity as popular and democratic in contrast to the traditional ceremony of the reign of Isabel II.¹⁷ To that end, radical circles and committees planned to bring the monarch to the exact parts of the country where republican and counter-revolutionary opposition was the strongest.¹⁸ This project reflected the conviction of Ruiz Zorrilla, the main leader of the progressive democrats, that the king 'needed the support of the popular elements, making them forget the scorn with which the Bourbons treated them'.¹⁹

It is true, however, that the radicals did see themselves as the primary support and, to some extent, the genuine promoters of Amadeo's monarchy. The majority of the 191 votes that made the Duke of Aosta king came from their ranks. Moreover, his candidacy had been backed by the key leaders of the radicals, in opposition to the option of the Duke of Montpensier, who was largely supported by the conservative liberals. Not surprisingly, their behaviour reflected the conviction that the new monarch was virtually patrimony of the group. For that reason, after the king opted to resolve three successive government crises in a single year by putting his trust in the conservatives, there was a widespread sense of disaffection. In mid-1872, a large number of the progressive-democratic militants drifted towards republican positions.²⁰

There is no question that the king's decisions were subject to the constitution, indicating that unlike his predecessor Isabel II, Amadeo I can be considered an example of a constitutional monarch.²¹ However, it is more questionable whether his actions met truly democratic, let alone parliamentary, criteria. Although he always tried to publicly justify his acts in a complicated political geometry that reflected the Cortes, he himself recognised in private that his motivations when entrusting the conservatives with the government had little to do with games of majorities and minorities. He complied, firstly, with the meddling of his father, Vittorio Emanuele II, in Spanish politics²² and, secondly, with the pressure from British and French diplomacy at a time when the international climate was characterised by the conservative reaction to the Paris Commune. Finally, he had his own prejudices about the workings of Spanish politics. In his opinion, the conservative party '[...] had the army for itself or at least most of it'. He also believed that 'in Spain the army is everything and without the army, nothing is done',²³ and that, consequently, the radicals, who lacked military support, constituted a danger to his throne.

Amidst the cool, even hostile, reception that greeted the king in 1871, the progressive radicals were alone in showing some enthusiasm. Most of their newspapers published complimentary biographical sketches and laudatory poems that, more than praising the

¹⁶ Barral Martínez, 2019.

¹⁷ Mira Abad, 2007.

¹⁸ Higuera Castañeda, 2016: 211–212.

¹⁹ Ruiz Zorrilla, 1877: 26.

²⁰ Higuera Castañeda, 2016: 247–248.

²¹ Troncoso and Mas, 1987.

²² Pascual Sastre, 1995: 273–274.

²³ Letter from Amadeo I to Victor Manuel II, 17-03-1872, in Seco Serrano, 2000: 226.

monarch who was arriving, extolled their hopes and expectations: ‘Health! Democratic King, / Son of the people, fortunate King, / you will be the priest who does not deceive / on the Altars of the New Law’, said one of these compositions disseminated on flyers.²⁴ In little more than a year, the image of the democratic king had weakened considerably. In fact, the radical media began to make note of a thinly disguised hostility. This is illustrated by the media campaign launched in mid-1872 by *El imparcial*, the principal party publication, after the formation of the conservative government of General Francisco Serrano. The intention was to warn the monarch of the risks he faced if he lost the support of the radicals definitively.

The article that had the most tongues wagging was entitled ‘The Vatican’s Madwoman [La loca del Vaticano]’.²⁵ The piece was attributed to Eduardo Gasset y Artime, the owner of the newspaper and a notable deputy. Everybody was aware that, by evoking the execution of Maximiliano of Mexico and the insanity that overtook his wife, the article was drawing a disturbing parallel with the political situation in Spain. It indirectly blamed Queen Maria Vittoria –whom it accused of suffering from extreme religiosity– for influencing her husband against the secular programme of the radicals, whom she had allegedly described as ‘riffraff’.²⁶ The question of the authorship of the article reached the Cortes. After being interrogated, the radical leader Cristino Martos declared ‘that he would have been proud to have written [it] himself, and that it was well that Kings and Queens should be occasionally reminded of their duties’.²⁷ In late July, Amadeo once again called the radicals to power. Both Gasset and Martos joined the new Ruiz Zorrilla government.

From that moment on, the conservatives began to explore solutions that, moreover, compromised the Crown’s stability. The alternatives ranged from the restoration of the Bourbons –whether by placing Prince Alfonso on the throne or through a regency involving his uncle, the Duke of Montpensier– to a dictatorship under General Serrano.²⁸ Thus, as Ambassador Layard asserted, Amadeo became the prisoner of the radical party. However, this only meant that his prerogatives were limited by the Cortes, as the radicals claimed. In any event, reducing this problem to a mere dispute between the monarchical factions does little to explain why the king ended up renouncing his throne and why the radicals joined forces with the Federal Party to proclaim the Republic. Here it is necessary to outline the radicals’ political project and the monarchy’s place in it, an exercise that raises questions of considerable importance, such as the proposal to abolish slavery, a constant area of conflict between radicals and conservatives that fuelled political polarization dramatically and engulfed the throne.

The Radical Party can be defined as the result of the adaptation of the progressive tradition of Spanish liberalism to the new democratic context that followed the Revolution of 1868. The crucial moment in the creation of this new political identity coincided with the debates surrounding the Constitution of 1869. It was at this time that the radical group began to take shape not only in parliament, but also in progressive clubs and circles

²⁴ This can be consulted enclosed with the letter from Pascual Giménez de Córdoba, José María Valera and Bernardo Carbonell to Víctor Balaguer (Albacete, 13-01-1871), at the Víctor Balaguer Archive Library, catalogue number 7100142.

²⁵ *El Imparcial*, 10-06-1872.

²⁶ Segovia, 1878: 849.

²⁷ PRO. FO. 72-1337. Classified report No. 99, 17-02-1873.

²⁸ Espadas Burgos, 1975: 306–308.

around the country, in the media and at grassroots level. The group was characterised by three key positions: to promote the development of the new constitution in an advanced direction; to ensure its application in the colonies of Cuba and Puerto Rico, which meant dismantling the system of slave exploitation; and to block access to the vacant throne to any candidate who represented the positions of doctrinaire liberalism. In other words, the aim was to safeguard a conception of non-legislatable natural rights in the Constitution and to support a candidature for an elected, chosen ruler with virtually no political autonomy. This candidature materialized in the option represented by the Italian monarchy: Amadeo of Savoy.²⁹

The Constitution of 1869 did include the non-legislatable nature of natural rights, albeit with some ambiguity and contradictions. With regard to the throne, the radicals' ambitions were not satisfied. None of the amendments presented for inclusion in the constitution were explicitly included in the final approved text. The representatives of radicalism in the Cortes stressed their intention to surround the Crown with republican institutions and design a democratic monarchy that would actualize the republican ideal or lead to it. For that reason, they defended their view of a monarchy with no real prerogatives, trying, for example, to ensure that royal assent to laws be obligatory and not by royal authority. Additionally, they tried to establish that the Cortes could reject the holder of the Crown or even the dynasty itself, making the monarchy not only chosen, but also an elected position, a mere revocable magistracy.³⁰

The radicals saw a united republic as a medium-term objective. The democratic monarchy had one purpose and, therefore, a more or less short shelf-life: it was to serve as a bridge to modernisation and it was the republican political system that represented the finish line. This was, of course, a position that any advanced liberal could defend, although the goal could be postponed to infinity. For the radicals, however, the republic was not so distant. Why, then, did the progressive-democrats want the monarchy? Simply put, to contain the powerful federal movement that had been spreading across Spain since the September revolution not, of course, because of its republican character, but because of its socialist connotations.³¹ Naturally, this preventative measure lessened the democratic sincerity of the group's political project, however much they proclaimed themselves uncompromising defenders of individual rights.

Amadeo I's treatment in the historiography has been universally kind. Without a doubt, he was a monarch who faithfully fulfilled his constitutional obligations. However, the Constitution of 1869 did not present only one interpretation. Throughout his reign, there was a struggle to develop or restrict the democratic definition of the monarchical regime, a conflict that struck at the heart of the Crown.³² The first of these proposals typified the radicals, who governed with Amadeo I during two brief periods, between July and September 1871, and from June 1872 until the king abdicated in February 1873. For them, the Crown could and should be subjected to criticism. As a party, they pressured the throne to limit its prerogatives and let the weight of public opinion restrict the king's ability to make decisions. Amadeo regarded this proposal as equivalent to being prisoner of a party and renounced his throne to prevent the subordination of the Crown; the prison metaphor, of course, does not correspond to the characteristics of a democratic monarchy.

²⁹ Higuera Castañeda, 2016: 147–190.

³⁰ Higuera Castañeda, 2019.

³¹ Miguel González, 2007.

³² Higuera Castañeda, 2019.

It was, paradoxically, his very abdication that would turn him into a symbol of democracy.

Amadeo's reign from the republican perspective

The political opening heralded by the Glorious Revolution could not fail to bring significant developments to the Spanish public space. The greatest, without a doubt, was the emergence of a federal republican movement, established in the preceding years, that grew far beyond what the supporters of the liberal monarchy had expected. Grouped together in the Federal Party after late 1868, the republicans scored notable successes both on the street and at the ballot box. While they were not victorious in the 1869 election to the Cortes, they sent a significant number of deputies who helped to spread their doctrines even further from the rostrum. The constitution, of course, did not meet their expectations to the extent that it contained monarchical principles. However, they had two advantages on their side: a vacant throne and the enormous difficulties encountered by the monarchical groups trying to present the Cortes with a candidate to fill it.

Many truly believed that the country would never find a king and that the situation would naturally result in the proclamation of a republic. This conviction was consistent with the republican position that monarchy and democracy were incompatible principles by definition. As Emilio Castelar argued, kings do not come out of the ballot box. Logically, there was irreparable disappointment when the government found a candidate for the throne in the duke of Aosta. The vote for Amadeo of Savoy to be king of Spain in the Cortes in November 1870 crowned two years of growing frustration, even more so because, immediately following the vote, 'random acts against the republicans' were reported, prompted by the violent 'Gang with Clubs' ['Partida de la Porra'], a name applied to the leaders of a dirty war that was allegedly directed from the Ministry of the Interior itself. The Federal Party publicist, Nicolás Estévanez, who witnessed the cannon shots that announced the election of the king to the people of Madrid, said that to the ears of the republicans, they sounded like 'funeral salvos, sadly echoing in the space and in our hearts'.³³

The election of the monarch, however, did not put a stop to republican propaganda, which redefined its strategies. The option of insurrection, promoted by the federalist's Jacobin faction, became stronger. Its failure to ignite was due, firstly, to the assassination of the Prime Minister, General Juan Prim, in late 1870, which led to a reinforcement of the authorities' prevention measures. More importantly, the path of violence did not have the blessing of leaders like Francesc Pi i Margall. The leader of the Federal Party understood that in the context of the liberties enshrined in the Constitution of 1869, for all the exceptions that might arise, any armed response was illegitimate. He made this clear to the activists who sought his support to carry out a plan of insurrection:

Impossible, sirs. I cannot give my name to a movement like this one, the results of which cannot be good, as it is unjustified. Under the reign of Amadeo, we enjoy as many liberties as those that are enjoyed in Switzerland. If a revolution is to prevail, it would only be justified against an imperious and tyrannical regime, and we have nothing of the sort today in Spain.³⁴

These considerations provide an initial insight into a view of the reign of Amadeo I that

³³ Estévanez, 1903: 340.

³⁴ Fernández Calzada, 1926: 89–90.

gradually solidified within republicanism. From the outset, the differences between the public discourse and private opinion are plain to see. The republicans could not fail to recognise that this monarchy had little to do with that of Isabel II. Moreover, there was no reason to envy the forms of government in other European countries that were regarded as more advanced, and which many republicans were familiar with from their time in exile. However, the election of the new sovereign was clearly received with a mixture of indignation and disappointment. The republican press became a hotbed where political criticism alternated with ridicule. From the first day, members of the press worked to delegitimize the image of the new monarchy, using mocking nicknames that emphasised the king's foreign origins like 'Macaroni I', or a comic wordplay like the 'Duke of Lobster' (*duque de Aosta/duque de Langosta*), which animalised him both rhetorically and graphically.³⁵

Fuelling the xenophobia that disparaged or ridiculed the king's foreign origins was a strategy that promised good results and even theatrical success.³⁶ At the same time, the myth of the irrepressible spirit of independence as a distinctive feature of the Spanish nation was invoked in the form of the uprising of 2 May 1808 against the French or the 1520 *comunera* revolt against the equally foreign Charles V. The xenophobic component was also part of the aristocratic opposition to the new monarchy, although this class also emphasised the legitimist argument and rejected the king's bourgeois nature ('common' in the words of his *soi-disant* peers).³⁷ However, the arguments of the federalists also reclaimed classic elements of republican criticism of the monarchy, such as the rejection of privilege, the defence of the radical equality of citizens – as opposed to subjects – and the Manichaean contrast between the people and the palace, poverty and opulence, the exploited and the exploiters.

Unquestionably, the public discourse about the monarchy that was dominant amongst Spanish republicans was characterised by outright rejection. No nuances were recognised between doctrinaire and liberal monarchies; both forms were condemned equally. In contrast to what could be said in private, public declarations were categorical, such as this address made to the king by republican Ramón Pérez Costales on the occasion of a royal visit to the Galician city of La Coruña:

I approach you with all the respect that a man deserves from me, and all the repugnance that a king inspires in me. You, King Amadeo, place your foreign figure in a city that has always been jealous of its Spanishness and always worshipped the sacred idea of its independence. [...] Moreover, La Coruña is a republican city. [...] You then, King Amadeo, are in enemy country.³⁸

The republican contempt for the monarchy and the monarch was expressed in newspapers, clubs, on the street and in representative institutions, especially at municipal level. Federal representatives in the Jaén City Council, for example, censured a proposal submitted by a monarchist counsellor to refer a manifesto to the Cortes declaring their satisfaction with Amadeo's accession. In the town of Linares, the Cortes were reproved

³⁵ See the caricature in *La campana de Gracia*, 27-11-1870.

³⁶ One example of this was the successful reception of the comedy piece, 'Macaroni I', by Navarro Gonzalvo, which was boycotted by the 'Partida de la Porra'.

³⁷ Sánchez García, 2019.

³⁸ Alfeirán and Romero, 2001: 59–62. Barral-Martínez, 2019: 405.

for electing a king who was also a foreigner.³⁹ In towns where there was republican representation, all expenses arising from royal visits were voted against, and attempts were made to prevent official representatives from attending royalist celebrations. Visits were often sabotaged to diminish their splendour, as in Santander, where the federalist representative Prudencio Sañudo cited municipal ordinances to keep the king's car from driving down the main streets, 'as his toadies want'.⁴⁰

However, public discourse did not fully illuminate the Spanish republican view of the new monarchy. Below the leaders, the behaviour of the republican man on the street was somewhat different. In this respect, the comments made by the British ambassador regarding the king's travels in September 1871 are particularly interesting. His reports reveal that, far from coming up against firm rejection in republican-majority towns, Amadeo was received with respect and a certain degree of acceptance:

I was anxious to ascertain the impression that the King's journey had made upon the population of those important cities [Valencia and Barcelona], which, especially as regards the working classes, may be considered the most republican in Spain [...] Every effort had been made by the republican and Carlist [legitimist] leaders [...] to induce the people to abstain from any demonstration, and to hold aloof from the King. They were so far successful at Valencia, that, on his arrival, His Majesty was coldly received, but after three or four days['] residence in that city, he had completely gained the good opinion of the population, [so] that on his departure he received an ovation such as, I was assured, had never before been witnessed in that part of Spain.⁴¹

According to the information received by Layard, the monarch was more successful in Barcelona: 'the republican leaders themselves admit that the King's visit has done much to revive the monarchical feeling in Catalonia'.⁴² However, despite the fact that Amadeo's 'simple and unaffected manners' evoked some sympathy in those who preserved an image of the monarchy characterised by the old regimental customs of the Bourbon dynasty, this did not mean that the republican movement was losing its clout among the working classes. After all, the rejection of the monarchical form of government was little more than the ultimate consequence of a political project based, above all, on the promise of the social emancipation of every level of society. The British consul in Barcelona interpreted it thus:

That H. M.'s personal popularity has been increased by it nobody doubts. But the republicanism of the working classes does not depend upon personal sympathy with this or that sovereign or the want of it. It rests upon the socialistic belief that republican institutions [...] would be likely to raise their condition altogether above its present level.⁴³

A turn in the republican public discourse regarding the king materialised the moment that he abdicated, an act that enabled the immediate proclamation of the Republic, although it would become more evident over time. Amadeo came to personify an honourable

³⁹ Jaén Milla, 2016: 161.

⁴⁰ Rodríguez Solís, 1893: 684.

⁴¹ PRO. FO. 72-1275. Report No. 44, 16-09-1871.

⁴² PRO. FO. 72-1276. Classified Report No. 3, 14-10-1871.

⁴³ PRO. FO. 72-1275. Copy of the report by James Haway to the acting ambassador in Madrid, 22-09-1871.

representation of the manifest incompatibility between the democratic principle and monarchical institutions. For that reason, after a few days, the republican press was already admitting that the king had ‘shown signs of not being as stupid as his detractors had claimed’ and that they did not mind recognising that Amadeo would be ‘a great figure in the future history of Spain’.⁴⁴ One of the many festive compositions that circulated in republican newspapers ironically emphasised the new image of the citizen king who, aware of his duty, had sacrificed his throne to complete the democratic structure: ‘You came as you go, / amidst snow and amidst frost / and thus, viewed from the rear, / now that I know you’re leaving / I like you three times as much’. The composition continued with a declaration that would henceforth be typical: ‘you did what you could / to clean up the mess’.⁴⁵

Amadeo I in the republican memory during the Restoration

Two military insurrections left their mark on Spain in 1874: the first put an end to the Federal Republic of 1873, and the second terminated the democratic experiment that had begun with the Revolution of 1868. In early 1875, the son of Isabel II, Alfonso XII, returned to the throne to lead a doctrinaire regime that made a clean sweep of the earlier period. Conservative propaganda termed this time as ‘the interim’.⁴⁶ Due to the doctrine of dual sovereignty, the legitimacy of the throne of Amadeo of Savoy was not recognised, as only the Bourbon dynasty had the historical right to occupy it. The republican movement returned underground. Although it was divided to a large extent, it was also reinforced by a number of old radicals who converted to republicanism before the restoration of the monarchy. In this context, the Spanish democrats reconstructed an image of Amadeo of Savoy that ranged from benevolence to nostalgia.

The former discordance between private opinion and public discourse disappeared; the image was to be instrumentalised to counter the new monarchy. The parameters that defined the political battle were completely different now that the political framework of rights and freedoms that had characterised the reign of Amadeo I and the Republic was no longer operational. Recovering the image of Amadeo did not compromise the defence of republican values which, in fact, were projected onto him by many republicans. His memory was thus used to subtly attack the restored monarchy, firstly because it was not democratic, and secondly, of course, because claiming this memory amounted to inviting Alfonso XII to imitate his predecessor’s example, not in his exercise of government, but in the resolution of his reign. At the same time, this involved claiming the legacy of the ‘democratic revolution’ and the protest against its being overthrown in 1874. To some extent, this instrumentalisation was paradoxical, given what the group had promoted between 1871 and 1873.

The particular defining features of republican culture contained objective factors that can explain how the figure of the Italian monarch awakened some degree of appreciation among many republicans during the Restoration. Firstly, Amadeo had been an ‘elected king’, an expression used to contrast his circumstances with those of Alfonso XII, whose legitimacy was strictly based on some historical facts that the republicans, logically, considered invalid. Moreover, albeit for opposite reasons, this same feature had intensified the aristocracy’s aversion to Amadeo, whose monarchy ‘had been elected, as

⁴⁴ *La Correspondencia del Diablo*, 16-02-1873.

⁴⁵ Ximénez Cros, ‘¡Feliz viaje!’, *El Cohete*, 16-02-1873.

⁴⁶ Bermejo, 1877.

if it were any other law'.⁴⁷ They also recovered the arguments wielded by the old progressives in 1870 and 1871 to defend the king: he was a frankly liberal monarch; he represented a family that embodied the unification of Italy against the papacy; he was the son of a sovereign who had been termed the 'republican king' more than once.⁴⁸ A clear sign of the institution's modernisation in a country of citizens was the desacralisation entailed in his decision not to serve 'by the grace of God', omitting this formula from his title and on coins.⁴⁹ Furthermore, compared to the courts of Alfonso XII and his mother, Amadeo's court was relatively austere: 'in the palace, he lived in a small number of rooms, without ostentation, and he received without ceremony'.⁵⁰

Even the aristocracy's rejection of him played in Amadeo's favour—even though it always concerned him—because it underscored his popular, democratic nature. The fact that the Duke of Aosta did not enjoy the running of the bulls was not merely anecdotal, as a substantial number of republicans advocated more civilised and edifying forms of leisure.⁵¹ Most of these features were not new, but had formed part of the public debate in earlier years. However, they only gained meaning for the republicans when they could be used as a counterexample to the new Bourbon monarchy. It had become clear that they no longer had the political opportunities that they had enjoyed during the reign of Amadeo, which had allowed them to rise to power peacefully. This idea was obvious to Emilio Castelar, the leader of the possibilist republicans, when he criticised

the most unusual principle that dynasties are quite immaterial and that under the monarchical principle, what Amadeo of Savoy, the king of universal suffrage, represents is as worthy as Alfonso XII, the king of legitimacy and inheritance.⁵²

Naturally, of all the notable features of the former king, particular emphasis was placed on his voluntary abdication of power, a gesture that sufficed to make him an example of civic virtue. Testimonials to the recodification of the Italian monarch's image are numerous. The freethinker, José Francos Rodríguez, asserted that Amadeo had left 'good memories' behind, in part because 'he had no love for the crown' and had left the country to 'prevent bloody uprisings', demonstrating that he prioritised 'duty over ambition'.⁵³ Speaking before a crowd of more than 2,000 people filling an auditorium to celebrate the anniversary of the Republic, a republican orator from Oviedo described him as a 'noble king, a gentleman and selfless'.⁵⁴ In the press, the epithets describing him as the 'democratic king' proliferated.⁵⁵ One of the federalists who did the most to bring down the king through insurrection, Nicolás Estévanez, wrote in his memoirs that Amadeo 'was a loyal king, but his dignity as a man compelled him to abdicate'.⁵⁶

Because of the fragmentation in the republican movement during the Restoration, there

⁴⁷ Escobar, 1949: 154.

⁴⁸ *La Iberia*, 28-08-1860.

⁴⁹ Francisco Olmos, 2008: 144–145.

⁵⁰ Pi y Margall, 1884: 10–11.

⁵¹ It is no coincidence that years after his abdication, the Barcelona Society for the Protection of Animals and Wild Plants appointed him honorary president, as noted in the republican newspaper *La Unión*, 08-04-1879.

⁵² *El Globo*, 09-05-1880.

⁵³ Francos Rodríguez, 1895: 16.

⁵⁴ *El carbayón*, 13-02-1886.

⁵⁵ *El Motín*, 26-01-1890. *La campana de Gracia*, 15-02-1902. *El Noroeste*, 12-11-1905.

⁵⁶ Estévanez, 1903: 398.

was no entirely uniform image that each sector of this part of the political spectrum could share. For example, in the case of the old radical converts to republicanism, there were displays of true vindication. Indeed, upon joining the Freemasons, some activists adopted the symbolic name of Amadeo (choosing a sobriquet that condensed the virtues with which the initiate identified was a typical feature of Spanish Freemasonry).⁵⁷ Considering that during the first years of the Restoration, these societies leaned decidedly towards republicanism, it is clear that the Duke of Aosta –whom many mistakenly believed to be a Freemason when he arrived in Spain– had become a true republican symbol.

Of course, this did not mean that the republican view of the monarchy had changed. Anti-monarchism was, in fact, one of the few points of consensus between the different republican groups. In a work dedicated to the reign of Amadeo of Savoy in Spain, Pi y Margall, the principal representative of Spanish federalism until the end of the century, insisted that ‘a nation that combines the first and the most important magistracy of the state in one family cannot be sovereign’. Nonetheless, he drew a considerably benevolent profile of the Italian monarch, albeit one that was somewhat condescending and pained:

Amadeo of Savoy was young, but empathetic, and short of understanding. He knew nothing of Spain, the history, language, institutions, customs, parties, men; and his talents could not compensate for such a serious shortage. His character was not very strong. He had no great vices, but neither did he have great virtues. Little moderate in his appetites, he was even less prudent in satisfying them. One good quality was clear: he was not and did not appear to be ambitious. He showed little desire to hold on to his position; he said from the start that he would not oppose the nation by force, and he kept to that, preferring to lose his crown than to break his oath. This loyalty was certainly his principal virtue and the only standard of his conduct.⁵⁸

It is interesting to see how the essential features of Pi y Margall’s assessment correspond with the opinion of a figure who was much closer to Amadeo, Manuel Ruiz Zorrilla. At that time, the leader of the radicals was heading one of the main factions of Spanish republicanism, the progressives, from exile. In Switzerland, he wrote a vindictory pamphlet, which was published in London in 1877, in which he defended his work in the government during the Savoy monarchy. On its pages, he demonstrated that his new republican faith was not incompatible with a memory that undoubtedly intentionally exaggerated Amadeo’s qualities, disregarding the criticism hurled at the king by the radicals during 1872, in order to diminish those of Alfonso XII, his successor to the throne:

Young, brave, modest, generous, a lover of all that could gain him popularity, an enemy of every act that would not make him appear to be a faithful observer of the fundamental code and constitutional practices: accessible to all, no great lover of official ceremony and pomp; strolling alone and simply dressed, down the lanes of the Court, and lavishing his greetings upon the worker and the soldier [...] he had all the qualifications needed by a people as democratic as ours and for a political world as disturbed as that of Spain.

He did not have a knowledge of men, which is not acquired at his age, or of the history and parties of a country, where he had just arrived, but this was the

⁵⁷ Hidalgo Nieto, 1985: 207.

⁵⁸ Pi y Margall, 1884: 7.

work of time and he had only needed one defect [...] a lack of attachment to the office.⁵⁹

If a king with these virtues had not been able to consolidate a democratic monarchy in Spain, he seems to argue, then democracy simply could not develop in a monarchical framework. He underscored this in his 1888 manifesto:

We have the right to demand that those who call themselves our representatives always affirm, as long as the facts do not prove otherwise, that the monarchy and democracy are incompatible, with the trial done with the illustrious house of Savoy obtaining no results, despite the best will on the part of the people and the greatest good will on the part of the monarchy.⁶⁰

The Duke of Aosta died in early 1890. Of course, the republicans memorialized him with kind, even laudatory, words in the press connected to his former proponents. For instance, the paper *El país* said that Amadeo I

made a most sacred religion of his duties, and when he saw that it was impossible to fulfil them, he sacrificed his own power for the sake of peace in the country, ceding to the ostensibly powerful republican opinion.⁶¹

The federalist paper, *La república*, echoed these words, writing that ‘history’ would end up recognising that

this monarch acted with scrupulous loyalty and an excellent desire, and he knew how to nobly abandon his position once he was persuaded that his efforts were dashing against the impossible.⁶²

At that time, however, the monarchical government had reinstated universal suffrage in addition to the freedom of the press and freedom of association promulgated a few years earlier. Although these freedoms were systematically distorted in practice, the memory of the Revolution of 1868 and the monarchy of Amadeo no longer worked as counterexamples to the restored monarchy.

It is surely with this purpose in mind that as late as the dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera, established in 1923 with the backing of Alfonso XIII, this image once again gained strength. A republican newspaper in Figueras, for instance, published an editorial on its front page that equated Pi y Margall and Amadeo in stature: ‘two men who sacrificed everything for the sake of their ideal, for the good of the people, for freedom’. It asserted that the Duke of Aosta ‘tried to impose peace where there was none’, but ‘despite his noble proposals [...] he was not able to resolve anything’. According to the *cliché* repeated since 1873, his renunciation of the throne revealed an ‘altruistic, noble, selfless gesture’ that they praised with great solemnity: ‘looking at the sincere abdication of King Amadeo of Savoy, we [...] find ourselves respectful and we genuinely remember him with eternal recognition’.⁶³ This was, as always, a warning and, at the same time, advice for a new monarch who would feel the temperature of his throne rising in 1931.

⁵⁹ Ruiz Zorrilla, 1877: 51.

⁶⁰ ‘Manifiesto de don Manuel Ruiz Zorrilla’, *El País*, 05-03-1888.

⁶¹ *El País*, 20-01-1890.

⁶² *La República*, 21-01-1890.

⁶³ *Libertad*, 05-03-1927.

Like some of his predecessors, he too decided to renounce what force – in this case, votes – had already taken from him.

Conclusion

To a large extent, Spanish historiography has reproduced the image of Amadeo of Savoy handed down by the republicans. It may even be argued that historians have often assumed the role of judge to exonerate Amadeo from the political vagaries of his reign and discern an exact orderliness in his fulfilment of his functions that other Spanish kings lacked. The problem does not lie in determining whether this was or was not the case because, in fact, that is not the function of the historian. In other words, this perspective does not help to explain the meaning of his reign or the reasons for its failure. While simply assuming that Amadeo I was a ‘democratic king’ cannot be immediately ruled out, it is open to modification. To begin with, the resolution to complete the parliamentarisation of the monarchy was not realised during his reign, to a large extent because this was not a goal shared by all of his supporters, let alone by the king himself, who wanted above all to safeguard his prerogatives against the parliament.

Similarly, as Alicia Mira has observed,⁶⁴ although the king’s conduct and the image he projected contrasted with the almost absolutist ostentation of Queen Isabel II and Alfonso XII himself, the logic behind his behaviour corresponded to an aristocratic upbringing that primarily focused on self-perpetuation.⁶⁵ Therefore, it is essential to consider the expansion strategies of a dynasty that, in competition with other royal houses, had successfully adapted to the transformations required of monarchies worldwide by the liberal revolutions. It is no mere anecdote that this simple, cordial monarch was deeply disturbed when Manuel Ruiz Zorrilla, the president of two of his governments, addressed him as ‘boy’ instead of ‘your majesty’: ‘he is not used to conducting himself [...] with kings’,⁶⁶ Amadeo stated, implying that royals merited special treatment. He was not a citizen, but the king. Of course, he was never the ‘democratic king’ sought by the radicals to carry their political project forward, nor the king constructed by the republicans during the Restoration for patently instrumental aims. That was not his culture, and those were not the criteria that guided his reign.

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⁶⁴ Mira Abad, 2007.

⁶⁵ In this respect, see Monika Wienfort’s observations on the adoption of particular bourgeois values in the social practices of monarchies, even if they did not fully adopt the middle-class lifestyle: ‘Core elements of a traditional dynastic heritage, namely a personal sense of chosen-ness by divine providence and the wish of an important political role remained prominent in the self-awareness and self-imagination of most European Monarchs’, ‘Dynastic Heritage and Bourgeois Morals: Monarchy and Family in the Nineteenth Century’, in Müller and Mehrkens, 2016: 166.

⁶⁶ Bolaños Mejías, 1999: 232.

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