

ÉLITES AND POWER  
IN  
TWENTIETH-CENTURY  
SPAIN

*Essays in Honour of*  
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## 14. THE IDEOLOGICAL CONVERSION OF THE LEADERS OF THE PSOE, 1976–1979\*

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‘When we say our party is Marxist, we have serious reasons for doing so.’  
Felipe González, August 1976

‘It’s a mistake for a socialist party to declare itself Marxist.’  
Felipe González, May 1978

‘Basically, I haven’t changed, and there are my statements to prove it.’  
Felipe González, June 1979

During the 1976 Summer School of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party, the party secretary, Felipe González, delivered a long speech to an audience composed mainly of Socialists who had joined the party before Franco’s death in 1975, or, at the latest, before the initiation of the transition to democracy. González devoted his lecture to defining the identity of the PSOE.<sup>1</sup> He felt compelled to do so, for, from the beginning of the 1950s onwards, the PSOE had been losing prominence among the forces which had fought against the Francoist dictatorship until, in the regime’s final years, it was far from being hailed as an organization with a political future. On the left, the PSOE’s efforts paled into insignificance beside the halo which surrounded the Partido Comunista de España (PCE), the Spanish Communist Party, on account of the latter’s longer and harder struggle against Francoism. In addition (and without going beyond the limited boundaries of the so-called socialist family) the historical initials of the PSOE now had to contend with serious competition from other options, such as the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), the Popular Socialist Party, led by Enrique Tierno Galván, and others which, in recent years, had appeared all

\* Tr. by Sheelagh Ellwood. I am grateful to Antonio García Santesmases for the help he has given me in allowing me to consult his unpublished study, ‘La evolución ideológica del socialismo en la España actual’.

<sup>1</sup> Felipe González, ‘Línea política del PSOE’, *Socialismo en Libertad* (Madrid, 1976), 21–58.

over Spain. Thus, by 1976, it was necessary to re-establish the credentials of the PSOE on a firm footing; to define its identifying characteristics, what it was and what were its aspirations, with regard to both the Communists and the other Socialist groups and parties.

The PSOE's first secretary (or secretary-general) found no better way of establishing the party's identity than by appealing, above all, to its historical legitimacy: the PSOE was a party with a history behind it. However, hard on the heels of historical legitimacy came ideological legitimacy: the PSOE was defined as a 'Marxist party'. There was the bond with the *fons et origo*, and there the fidelity to the theory of the founding fathers. The PSOE was a party with a history and a Marxist party. It was other things, too. It was a democratic, mass party, which was class-based, pluralist, federative, and internationalist. But it was legitimated first and foremost by its theory and its history.

The most substantial parts of the analysis made by the first secretary of the PSOE in that speech were incorporated into the political report approved by the party's XXVII Congress, held in December of that same year. Still only semi-legal and in an ambient mood of anti-Francoist struggle and conquest of liberties, the PSOE defined itself as a 'class-based and, therefore, mass party, which is Marxist and democratic'. These selfsame adjectives had been used by Felipe González in the speech with which the PSOE was presented to its members and to public opinion. Thus, on the threshold of 1977, the PSOE defined itself as a Marxist party. No one appeared to disagree with, or to dislike, that identity, although not everyone was agreed about its meaning and implications.<sup>2</sup>

Eighteen months later, when the first general elections since 1936 had converted the PSOE into the leading opposition party and had routed the remaining members of the socialist family, Felipe González stated publicly that it had been a mistake to define the PSOE as Marxist. No other socialist party had done so and not even the PSOE, in all its hundred years of history, had ever before had the idea of defining itself as Marxist. There was no reason whatsoever to change that century-old custom. It had been a mistake. To undo it, the secretary-general was prepared to do battle in the bosom of his own party. How and why the PSOE switched from having serious reasons for calling

<sup>2</sup> XXVII Congreso PSOE (Madrid, 1977), 115-23. This was not simply the political motion adopted by the Congress. The majority of the party groups had presented motions along the same lines, or imbued with even more radical tones, as can be seen in XXVII Congreso: *Memoria de gestión de la Comisión Ejecutiva* (n.pl., n.d.), 7-68.

itself Marxist to considering such a definition a mistake, will be the object of our attention in the following pages.

### THE SERIOUS REASONS FOR AVOWING MARXISM

In 1976, the Socialist Party's definition of itself as Marxist was no more than one element in a complex ideological edifice, in whose foundations lay the principle of the transition to socialism. The PSOE had few members then—scarcely 10,000—and the party lacked solid structures and organization.<sup>3</sup> The Socialists believed, however, that they already possessed the instrument capable of 'building a new model' of society, as yet not established in any country, and whose principal characteristic would be the combination of socialism and freedom. Far removed from social democracy, which limited itself to remedying 'the most brutal facets of capitalism', and from what they termed social dictatorship, or social bureaucracy, which was nothing more than state capitalism, the 10,000 Spanish Socialists were intent upon initiating a long march of 'transition to socialism'.<sup>4</sup>

In accordance with a long-established tradition, that march was envisaged as consisting of various phases, prior to reaching the new model of society, which would be 'self-managing socialism'. The first stage would be the transition from the existing state, defined as Fascist, to formal democracy. The next stage, still within the confines of democracy, would be to advance towards the implantation of the political hegemony of the working class and its allies. Finally, that same bloc of anti-capitalist classes would put an end to capitalist exploitation and would establish a classless society, in which the apparatus of the state would be entirely replaced by worker self-management at all levels. The Socialist Party, declared Felipe González to the XXVII Congress, would conquer 'irreversibly a society in which the exploitation of man by man will disappear: a classless society'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For data on PSOE and UGT membership, see José F. Tezanos, 'Continuidad y cambio en el socialismo español El PSOE durante la transición a la democracia', *Sistema*, 68-9 (Nov. 1985), 24. At the time of the XXVII Congress, the total number of militants was 9,141.

<sup>4</sup> 'Resolución política', in *XXVII Congreso PSOE*. In 'Socialismo es libertad' (*XXVII Congreso PSOE*, pp. 9-16), Alfonso Guerra defined socialism's task as 'the radical transformation of capitalist society; its replacement by a society in which relations between men are radically different to what they are at present'.

<sup>5</sup> And he added, in threatening tone, 'Let it be clear to one and all: the party will never renounce that goal'; 'El trábajo empieza ahora', *XXVII Congreso PSOE*, p. 102.

Girt up with the Marxism ideology and with its sights fixed on the future society, the Socialist Party arrogated to itself the role of 'central axis of the progressive historical forces'. In this way, the idea of the unity of the left, or of all progressive forces, to achieve the liquidation of the Francoist dictatorship was reiterated, but with an important innovation. Until Franco's death, the would-be mainstay of that political line had been the PCE, architect of the Junta Democrática and of the first steps towards the formal co-ordination of the various sectors of the anti-Francoist opposition. The PSOE reaffirmed the validity of that approach and reproduced it in its own proposals. At the same time, however, it attempted to take upon itself the role that the long struggle against Francoism had assigned to the Communists.<sup>6</sup>

In order to achieve that position, it was crucial to have a large and powerful organization and to state the Marxist essence of socialism. No one who was not a Marxist could seriously hope to become the keystone of the opposition to the dictatorship, or to those who intended to be its continuation. Moreover, it was not simply a question of opportunist tactics. It was because the refusal to accept the society constructed by Francoism was inherent in the visceral rejection of Francoism and its heirs. To break with the dictatorship's political system was equivalent to repudiating the social system which had served as its underpinning. To disclaim the state was also, therefore, to disavow the society, and the construction of a new state appeared as merely the first step on the long road to the building of a new society. This, in the political context and climate of the time, was the heart, the kernel of Marxism.

Within the ranks of the political class which inherited Francoism, a reformist sector came to the fore and made contact with the forces of the opposition. As this happened, the avowal of Marxism acquired the specific function of dressing the negotiations with those in power in ideologized garb. This bargaining was, of course, carried on in accordance with the political strategy of combining pressure from below with dialogue above.<sup>7</sup> Such dialogue did not, however, imply

<sup>6</sup> See *XXVII Congress PSOE*, 'Resolución política', p. 108. Felipe González expressed a similar idea when he said that the party must 'jealously guard its independence' and, at the same time, 'put its shoulder to the wheel with all the organizations which pursue the same objective', momentarily or strategically.

<sup>7</sup> The policy of pressure and negotiation was proclaimed by Felipe González during the Summer School, adopted by the XXVII Congress, and reaffirmed by González in his speeches to the Congress. José M. Maravall has explained the transition as a mixture of reformist policy from above and social pressure from below, in J. M. Maravall, *La política de la transición* (Madrid, 1981), 17-31.

reneging on essentials, nor renouncing the final goal. Negotiations were entered into because this was the way to press forward on the long march to socialism. When all was said and done, the first stage laid down by the theory was, precisely, the conquest of democracy.

In addition to being the expression of opposition to Francoism as a political genre and the ideological alibi for what ultimately became known as the 'negotiated break' (*ruptura pactada*), the claim to a Marxist vocation also fulfilled a particular purpose in the PSOE's attempts to become the only socialist party and to talk to the PCE on equal terms. The self-definition of the PSOE as a democratic, Marxist party, and its proposals for self-managing socialism (upheld by such prestigious economists as Miguel Boyer), blocked the appearance of ideological competitors for the same political territory. In the jockeying for positions to decide which party was the most Marxist, the PSOE leaders did not allow themselves to be overwhelmed by their nearest neighbours, who, one after another, were gradually integrated into the PSOE. The last of them was incorporated just a few days before the definitive abjuration of Marxism.<sup>8</sup>

Above all, the avowal of Marxism allowed the PSOE to go to its inevitable rendezvous with the PCE without an inferiority complex. Everyone was on the same side, the heirs of the same traditions. Certainly, they each had different ways of interpreting those traditions—that much had to be clear—but, even so, they were not mutually exclusive ways. If they did not allow Marxism to be snatched from them, the Socialists could become the Communists' rivals in the struggle to attract a left-wing electorate which was, foreseeably, very ideology-conscious. The disdain with which the Communist leaders treated the new-comers, their young competitors, turned into bitter disappointment when they saw the results obtained by the PSOE thanks to a political line which linked references to Marxism with an emphasis on liberty.

Laying claim to Marxism as a characteristic of the socialist identity should thus be seen as the result, or the expression, of the political culture of left-wing, anti-Francoist opposition, which implied the rejection of Francoism's political system and the repudiation of its capitalist society. However, it should also be seen as the key ideological

<sup>8</sup> The unity of the socialists in a single party—rather than in a federation of parties—was one of the central concerns of the PSOE leaders in 1976 and 1977. Santesmases (*loc. cit.*) identifies four socialist groups at the beginning of the transition: the PSOE which was loyal to the leadership in exile, the PSP, the Federation of Socialist Parties, and the PSOE recognized by the Socialist International.

element in the PSOE's strategy of self-affirmation among the socialist groups and parties taken as a whole, and of competition with the PCE to achieve overall hegemony on the left. As the central concept of a proposal for the transition to socialism, and of the PSOE's becoming the kingpin of the democratic forces of the left, Marxism was not simply 'taken on board', but proclaimed and broadcast by Felipe González and his supporters within the Socialist leadership.

With this language on their lips, and with a political praxis of negotiation with the reformist heirs of the Francoist regime, the Socialists made far-reaching inroads into the new political system. Their first electoral success, in June 1977 (taking almost 30 per cent of the votes and obtaining 118 parliamentary representatives), meant that their status as a marginal force was at an end and placed them right at the centre of the party system which arose from those elections. In addition to initiating a tendency to what came to be known as an imperfect two-party system,<sup>9</sup> the 1977 elections had two basic consequences for the left as a whole. In the first place, the socialist groups or parties which had been the PSOE's rivals either went out of existence or were left heavily in debt. Secondly, of the hotchpotch communist world, only the PCE remained, albeit with results far below those they had dreamt of and a long way short of those obtained by the PSOE.<sup>10</sup>

So it was that, after the 1977 elections, the PSOE no longer had three of the serious reasons that had led it to declare itself Marxist in 1976. With its mass of voters and its 118 MPs, it was no longer on the margins of the political system; the crushing defeat it had inflicted on the other socialist parties had made it cease to be simply one among many; and thanks to its electoral success with respect to the Communists, the PSOE was no longer the party presumably condemned to play second fiddle in the leftist orchestra. At the same time, the PSOE found itself inside the system and in a position of strength. In addition, it was the only socialist party and occupied a clearly hegemonic place *vis-à-vis* and PCE. In short, the PSOE had totally subverted the expectations aroused by its appearance in the final years of anti-Francoist opposition. Not only that, but it had also completely altered its objective situation in the political system.

<sup>9</sup> In an interview published by *El País*, 15 Jan. 1978, Felipe González stated that 'the voters did not want to maintain so many initials . . . and turned in the direction of what we might consider an imperfect, clarifying, and efficient two-party system'.

<sup>10</sup> In the general elections of June 1977, the PSOE obtained 29.21% of the votes, whilst the PCE obtained only 9.24%, and the parties grouped together in the coalition Unidad Socialista PSP-FPS obtained a mere 4.46%. The respective numbers of

This modification of the PSOE's real position in the party system had the effect of changing the perception of the socialist leaders who were closest to Felipe González, with respect to the party's short-term objectives and the strategies required to achieve them. In a very brief period of time, the values of a leftist culture formed in opposition to Francoism gave way to those of a new political system which was the fruit of an all-party consensus. A culture which centred on the rejection of a given power system was replaced by one which fed on the conviction that it was necessary to consolidate the newly unveiled system. To express it in the jargon in vogue at the time, the struggle for the occupation of new spheres of power took over from the fight for the conquest of new areas of freedom. For the leaders of the PSOE, the new task was two-fold, on account of the Socialists' own vocation for using political power as an instrument for effecting social change, and because of the weakness of the governing party, whose fragility could, at any moment, result in a power vacuum.<sup>11</sup> For these two reasons, once they had conquered liberty (and given the way in which they did so), the Socialists had to prepare themselves for the mastery of power.

However, there was only one way to become the governing party, and that was by having sufficient electoral support. Once democracy had been established, and the freedom-fighting political line had been put aside, the party had to orientate its activities towards making itself more attractive to the electorate. The point from which it started was not bad and, indeed, it could be said to be considerably better than what could have been hoped for up to a very short while earlier. Nevertheless, whilst the party's initial position was not bad, it was not sufficient to enable it to achieve power. It was necessary to consolidate what it had already and, at the same time, expand into new areas. Tactically, the consequences of this were obvious: since there were no longer any competitors on the left, the only expansion possible had to be on the right. The adversary was not the PCE, now limited to the small patch that commanded its fidelity, but Unión de Centro Democrático (UCD), the Union of the Democratic Centre, which had obtained 34 per cent of the votes in the 1977 election.

parliamentary representatives were 118, 20, and 6. The results are detailed in J. de Esteban and L. López Guerra, *Los partidos políticos en la España actual* (Barcelona, 1982),

74.

<sup>11</sup> 'The fragility of the governmental coalition', said González in Jan. 1978, 'creates a permanent situation of governmental crisis which obliges us to think of a possible power vacuum in less time than was anticipated' (*El País*, 15 Jan. 1978).

## THE ERROR OF AVOWING MARXISM

Felipe González appears to have been the first person to realize that the basic definition which he himself gave of the PSOE, to arm it for its struggle for freedom and for hegemony on the left, was precisely what had to be destroyed in order to adapt the party to its new goals of increasing its electoral appeal and achieving power. To define the party as Marxist, and in the next breath to deny that it was social democratic or social bureaucratic, might be useful for identifying the PSOE as the leading party on the democratic left. That definition, however, became excessively narrow and placed useless limitations on the party when the latter's aim was to occupy not only the entire space of the non-Communist left, but also part of that of a very motley centre, which lacked adequate structuring, suffered from factional infighting, and was not without reformist and social democratic currents.

González went straight to the heart of Socialist identity as it had been established during the XXVII Congress. In the course of a meeting with journalists, and with the intention of informing the whole country, including his own party and fellow-leaders, he stated that it had been a mistake to define the Socialist Party as Marxist.<sup>12</sup> He was thus attempting, in one fell swoop, to destroy the main shibboleth of the previous phase. All who were socialists in 1976 had been united in Marxism and no one who had been a socialist during the Franco regime could relinquish the direct connection with the Marxist tradition. Now, however, said the party's secretary-general, the PSOE must no longer define itself as Marxist. It was not, of course, that there was no room for Marxists in the PSOE, but, rather, that there must also be space for many other people from a wide variety of theoretical and ideological backgrounds.

The idea of abandoning this feature of the socialist identity was clearly related to a significant change in the definition of the party's top priority tasks. Prior to making so forceful an entry into the political system, the Socialists always spoke of *formal* democracy, with the object of arguing immediately afterwards the need to transcend the conquest of democracy stage and establish the hegemony of the working class. The post-1977 novelty consisted in dropping the word 'formal' and in silencing the idea of the implantation of workers'

<sup>12</sup> According to *Ya*, 10 May 1978, González said the previous day in Barcelona, 'It's a mistake for a socialist party to declare itself Marxist, because this term has been used pejoratively by the right' (quoted in R. del Aguila and R. Montoro, *El discurso político de la transición* (Madrid, 1984), 89).

hegemony, whilst insisting on the notion of making democracy deeper and more cohesive. Thenceforward, democracy in capitalist society would no longer be a stage to be surpassed on the road to the abolition of capitalism, but a political system to be consolidated and deepened, with a view to introducing reforms which would gradually change society.<sup>13</sup>

The change in priorities was accompanied by a clear shift away from the strategic line advocated during the first years of the transition from dictatorship to democracy. Between 1975 and 1977, without sacrificing its identity or its autonomy, the PSOE lost no opportunity to present itself as the unifying force of the progressive left. After the 1977 elections, appearing to be part of a coalition, or the ally of other forces, was not only uncomfortable, but might also prove to be counterproductive. Freedom had to be achieved in the company of others; government, by contrast, had to be attained alone. 'At the present time,' said Felipe González in January 1978, 'any alliance into which the party might enter would subtract, not add, votes.'<sup>14</sup>

Felipe González chose what might be called the German, or Nordic, socialist path to power. He was fully aware that that choice constituted a novelty for the so-called southern European socialist model, since it involved the rejection of a common left-wing programme, along French lines, and, at the same time, the rejection of participation in a government composed of centre or centre-right parties, in Italian style. 'Perhaps in Spain we shall see a break-away from the south European model, with the Socialist Party obtaining power by an absolute majority.' Such was the prospect opened by the 1977 elections and by the 'imperfect, clarifying, and efficient two-party system' which came out of them. The relative failure of the PCE made the PSOE unwilling to adopt a policy of left-wing unity which could only benefit the former. In this way, the Spanish Socialists repeated the same argument as that used by the leaders of the British Labour Party in the 1930s, when it was suggested to them (among others, by the Spanish Socialists) that they pursue unity of action with the Communists. At the same time, the limited success of UCD, which had proved unable to achieve an absolute majority and suffered from intrinsic internal weakness,

<sup>13</sup> The insistence on the fragility of democracy and the need for its consolidation became the main features of Spanish socialist thought from 1981 onwards and, particularly, from the XXIX Congress, held in October of that year. Cf. A. García Santesmases, 'Evolución ideológica del socialismo en la España actual', *Sistema*, 68-9 (Nov. 1985), 61-78, which constitutes a synthesis of more detailed research, as yet unpublished.

<sup>14</sup> *El País*, 15 Jan. 1978.

meant that there was little or no attraction for the Socialists in the idea of a coalition government, such as the Communist Santiago Carrillo never tired of proposing.<sup>15</sup>

Since its objective was to achieve power alone, the PSOE orientated itself towards policies which reaffirmed its character as a governing party. In the belief that the real possibility of forming a cabinet would result from the collapse of the existing governmental coalition, Felipe González tried to turn the PSOE into the only party capable of filling a 'possible power vacuum'. This required putting visible distance between the PSOE and the Communists and appearing before the electorate free from all Marxist connotations. It was shortly after the formulation of this tactical line that González expressed publicly his conviction that it had been a mistake to define the Socialist Party as Marxist; a mistake which, of course, he was prepared to correct.

The announcement of this intention fanned the flames of a certain opposition which was growing inside the Socialist Party itself, and which included some of its organizational bodies. The 1977 elections had enhanced the figure of the party's secretary-general within the socialist community, increasing his appeal and giving him an audience that none of the other leading figures of the PSOE had enjoyed. In the eyes of an increasingly critical sector, the party was fast heading towards personal leadership and electoralism. The custodians of ideological purity and collegiate leadership felt lashed and stung by González's new attitude to Marxism. Electoralism and personalism, plus the abrogation of Marxism, were proof positive of the transformation of the PSOE. From a political party whose goal was the construction of a new society via the conquest of political power by the working class, the PSOE was being converted into a party prepared to win elections in order simply to administer, and slightly to reform, capitalist society. The guardians of the doctrinal and ideological fundamentals duly prepared to put up a fight.

Foreseeably, the battle took the form of a debate on Marxism or, more exactly, on the definition of the Socialist Party as Marxist. The appearance on television of President Adolfo Suárez, on the eve of the 1979 general elections, and the results obtained by the PSOE in that electoral contest, prompted Felipe González to delay no longer his

<sup>15</sup> On the policies of the PCE in this period, see G. Morán, *Miseria y grandeza del Partido Comunista de España, 1939-1985* (Barcelona, 1986), 551-61. For the reception given to Carrillo's proposal for a 'government of democratic concentration', see F. Claudín, *Santiago Carrillo: Crónica de un secretario general* (Barcelona, 1983), 272-4.

decision to suppress the term 'Marxist' from the definition of the PSOE adopted by the 1976 party congress. Since that adoption could only be rectified by a new congress, the XXVIII Congress was called for May 1979, shortly after the general elections of March and the municipal elections of April.

The outcome of the confrontation between the so-called official and critical sectors of the PSOE is well known and will be only briefly summarized here.<sup>16</sup> The critical sector was inspired by Luis Gómez Llorente, Francisco Bustelo, and Pablo Castellano, all of whom were members of the party's executive committee, and spurred on by Enrique Tierno Galván, who, a year earlier, had dissolved his Popular Socialist Party to become an integral part of the PSOE. It entrenched itself in the defence of a political proposal whose principal merit was the reaffirmation of the Marxist character of the PSOE, in opposition to Felipe González. This proposal and definition were approved by the majority of the delegates who, on the following day, tried to elect an executive committee in which Felipe González would continue to be the secretary-general, but which would also give the critical sector substantial representation. The delegates wanted Felipe González to remain as secretary and the party to stay Marxist.

González, however, had expressed his intentions clearly: he would not be the leader of a party which defined itself as Marxist. Consequently, he did not stand for re-election—a move which caught his opponents unprepared<sup>17</sup> and provoked a leadership crisis amid much weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. No one was capable of composing an executive committee without Felipe González. As the PSOE vice-secretary, Alfonso Guerra, commented later, with unconcealed disdain for the critical sector, the sceptre was left abandoned on the table, and no one was capable of picking it up.<sup>18</sup> Felipe González was to return for the sceptre a few months later.

From that time onwards, the party ceased to define itself as Marxist. What was equally, if not more, important, none of those who liked to define themselves as Marxists or members of the critical sector ever again formed part of the party's executive committee. After the Extra-

<sup>16</sup> P. Preston, *The Triumph of Democracy* (London, 1986), 153–7.

<sup>17</sup> 'We never even remotely imagined that incompatibility in Felipe González', explained Francisco Bustelo shortly afterwards, in 'Puntualizaciones al Congreso Socialista', *El País*, 3 June 1979.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the recollections and impressions of Alfonso Guerra, contained in *Felipe González: De Suresnes a la Moncloa* (Madrid, 1984), 124–6. The same vol. also includes the reflections of Pablo Castellano.

ordinary Congress of September 1979, Felipe González truly did hold the sceptre in his hands.

### THE TRIUMPH OF GONZÁLEZ AND THE MATURITY OF THE PARTY

In the summer of 1979, between the XXVIII and the Extraordinary Congresses, Felipe González began a political and ideological offensive which, this time, had as its objective his own party. Since he wanted to appear to be free from any kind of alliance with the Communists (in spite of working alongside them on many town councils), and to undermine the position of UCD (despite having signed the 'Pacts of the Moncloa' with this party), Felipe González had to have a party which was homogenous in its leadership, disciplined in its practice, and coherent in its ideology. That is to say, he needed what he called during that summer a mature party. The debate around the abjuration of Marxism must be situated within the context of this campaign to turn the PSOE into a mature party.

In the initial phase—the composition of a homogeneous executive committee—he met with little opposition. Felipe González did not lend himself to any kind of compromise solution with the critical or Marxist sector. He refused to allow his name to appear in an executive committee proposed by the critical sector, in which he would constantly have been up against internal opposition and the accusation of abandoning ideals or betraying principles. He was not prepared to be part of an alien candidature; at most, he would include some of the critical sector in his own. In the event, not even this happened and all the members of the new executive committee, as well as owing their inclusion in the list to the personal decision of Felipe González held the same ideological views as he did.

The second stage of the campaign—the achievement of a disciplined party—involved no particular drama, due, perhaps, to the fact that the PSOE grew larger as it occupied new spheres of power. After the 1979 local government elections, the PSOE had thousands of town councils to administer. There were Socialist mayors in the most important cities and Socialists at the helm of many *diputaciones* (provincial councils). In addition, there were more than 10,000 Socialist town councillors—that is, more than the total PSOE membership in 1977. For thousands of Socialists, joining the party and entering public office had been two almost simultaneous operations. Naturally, and despite

the familiar protestations regarding the sacrifices involved in accepting a public post, thousands of these Socialists found that their début in political life brought with it a process of upward social mobility. For them, the party became the channel for their social promotion and for the improvement of their economic situation.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, the crucial factor in the maintenance of central discipline was not simply that this process occurred, but that it took place before local or provincial interest networks could be established. The lists of candidates for public offices were not drawn up on the basis of stable local or provincial political structures, which the central leadership had to accept. Rather, the designation process worked the other way round. Since the party structure was of recent creation, no one was in a position to dispute the capacity of the party executive committee (or, in the final analysis, of those on the committee who had the power to decide its composition) to decree who would run as candidates in local government elections. In this way, and perhaps for the first time in the political history of contemporary Spain, the central structure of a party was not the mirror image of local interests. On the contrary, local interests were subordinate to decisions taken at the centre. Thus, discipline was guaranteed.

With the critical sector awash in its own ineffectiveness and with internal discipline assured, Felipe González also devoted his attention in the summer of 1979 to speeding up the party's ideological maturing process. To explain it, he used a very plastic metaphor which may well seem rather inapposite: those who are unfamiliar with country lore, said González, do not know that when fruit farmers want figs to ripen quickly, they rub 'a little oil on the fruit's arse'. 'Well,' he continued, 'this party has no choice but to put up with having a little oil rubbed on its arse and to shorten its maturing process to a few months.'<sup>20</sup> In order to achieve this, González was willing to prepare the unguent with his own fair hand and to apply it without delay.

The ingredients he used in the elaboration of the ointment are clearly indicated in the interviews given to Juan Luis Cebrián for *El País* and Fernando Claudín for *Zona abierta* between the two congresses held by the PSOE in 1979. Above all, González denied any 'basic change', on the grounds that he had done no more than adapt his

<sup>19</sup> For a wealth of interesting data on Socialist leaders, militants, and voters, see J. F. Tezanos, *Sociología del socialismo español* (Madrid, 1983). The present writer is not aware of any study which has broached the process of the formation of the new Socialist political class.

<sup>20</sup> F. Claudín, 'Entrevista a Felipe González', *Zona Abierta*, 20 (May-Aug. 1979), 8.

analysis to reality, in order to achieve 'the present political maturity of the PSOE as a party'. The recurrent idea was that the PSOE must mature and, to do so, it must perceive its dual function in Spanish social and political life. The first, well-known—or, at least, much proclaimed—function was to offer 'an alternative for change'. The second, more of a novelty, was to constitute a 'point of reference which makes people feel secure'.<sup>21</sup> Change and security: these were the two substances which Felipe González proposed to mix, in equal parts, to obtain the oil of maturity.

The blending was to be done by means of a 'valid synthesis, which implies a broad base of popular representation'. The PSOE was to become the party of the three syntheses or, to be more exact, of a single, tripartite synthesis: 'a synthesis of ideological, sectorial, and territorial diversity'. In the first of these three, the PSOE's capacity must range from those who remained 'rigorously Marxist' to those who embraced socialism through a Christian-based commitment or simply from 'anthropological positions', amongst whom González mentioned specifically 'ecologists, krausists, and humanists'. Ideologically, then, the PSOE did not define itself in any concrete way, other than as a melting-pot, as the synthesis of a broad spectrum of ideologies, capable of including a whole universe of Marxists, Christians, ecologists, humanists, and even Krausists, a species thought to be extinct.<sup>22</sup> The meaning of the syntheses of the sectorial and territorial diversities was exactly the same. The aim was to open the PSOE to the widest possible range of social and territorial groupings.

What was omitted in those interviews was every bit as important as what was said.<sup>23</sup> In the interview given to *El País*, González made no mention of the socialists' struggle being defined as the fight for socialism. The erstwhile obligatory reference to the final goal the implantation of a society different to the present one—and to the transitional process which leads to that society by stages, gave way to a more generic definition of the struggle for socialism as a 'struggle for

<sup>21</sup> From the interview with Felipe González by Juan Luis Cebrián, *El País*, 14 June 1979.

<sup>22</sup> The Krausists were mentioned in the interview published in *El País*. In the interview published by *Zona Abierta*, it was said that the PSOE must reach those who considered themselves the heirs of the republican left.

<sup>23</sup> In truth, what González said in 1979, he also said in 1976. The crucial difference lay in the fact that, in 1976, he said things which he omitted in 1979. For example, the conquest of democracy to implant socialism after a stage of working-class hegemony, discussed in 1976, was reduced, in 1979, to the consolidation of democracy. González's ideology was like a garment from which strips were being progressively torn off.

freedom and equality through solidarity'. Clearly, these are the ideals of the French Revolution, whose mechanical and literal repetition was only avoided by replacing 'fraternity' with 'solidarity', a more or less identical concept. With respect to initiating the stages which mark the process of transition to socialist society, Felipe González stated, in response to a question posed by Fernando Claudín in *Zona abierta*, that, in reality, that process was already under way.

The results of the 1979 elections and the ideological campaign to accelerate the maturing of the PSOE reaffirmed two of the principal ideas enunciated in the previous year. In the first place, González emphasized that Socialism's goal was the consolidation of democracy. Without doubt, his insistence was closely related to the permanent crisis suffered by the governing party, UCD, immediately after winning the elections. A very influential sector of the Socialist leadership began to define alternatives as though it really were a question of taking the place of UCD: the latter's fragmentation endangered democracy itself, unless the PSOE made preparations to become an alternative in government. So it was that an idea with deep roots began its gentle penetration of Spanish socialism: a perception of the immediate task as the substitution of the bourgeoisie and its political representatives, on account of their manifest incapacity to consolidate a democratic political system.<sup>24</sup>

Secondly, the advance of this line of political thinking gave rise to a greater insistence on what was termed the 'autonomy of the socialist project'. According to González, the party 'must not be defined by its alliances, nor by a strategy in common with one or more other forces, but by its own project'. The appeal of the Socialist Party, said González candidly, diminished if it was linked by lasting agreements to other parties, especially to the PCE. In response to his interlocutor's insistence, Felipe González impatiently rejected as 'anti-Francoist' the notion of an 'alliance of democratic forces, in which the PSOE would be the central axis'—that familiar policy from the first stages of the transition to democracy. Neither the party nor the country could take any kind of common agreement between the political forces of the left.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The clearest exposition of this idea appeared after the period under consideration here, in an article by Javier Solana, 'La alternativa socialista', *Leviatán*, 9 (Autumn, 1982), 9. From that time onwards, the overriding images of the PSOE were those of a party which would be the 'backbone' of Spain and of its function as the 'modernizing' agent of society and the 'rationalizing' factor of the economy.

<sup>25</sup> F. Claudin, 'Entrevista', p. 8.

What was at stake with the desertion of Marxism as one of the Socialist Party's principal 'identifying marks' was, therefore, much more than simply a semantic dispute or a fight over the new executive committee. It was the preparation of the PSOE to make a final assault on the political system in such a way as not to appear to represent the threat of a change of society, or of the beginning of a process which would, ultimately, lead to a change of society. This new position necessitated a different conception of what a socialist party should be from that preached in 1976. It also required a new view of the party's priority goals and objectives and of its policy on alliances. A party of change and security; a party of ideological, sectorial, and territorial synthesis; a party which would consolidate and deepen democracy; which did not threaten to impose a change of society, or, as it was put then, a change of 'model of society'; and which, on its own strength, without any need for alliances, constituted an alternative for government. Such was the profile of a mature party and such were the reasons which prompted Felipe González to drop the epithet 'Marxist' from the Socialist identity.

There was, as we have noted, another reason. By suppressing the emblematic core of the previous socialist identity, Felipe González liquidated all internal opposition and decisively reaffirmed his own personal power. That was the most noteworthy result of the Extraordinary Congress held in September 1979. Naturally, when obliged to choose between Marx and González, the delegates—who, this time, had been elected by their respective federations—did not hesitate to opt for González. The PSOE ceased to define itself as Marxist. When this happened, all those who had previously defended the Marxist identity were either left out in the cold or excluded themselves voluntarily from the new leadership. At the same time, those who did not define themselves as Marxists—or who repented of having done so—broke into a vociferous chant of 'Fe-li-pe! Fe-li-pe!', showing with their enthusiasm who the real victor was. Whilst it had undoubtedly been crucial to redefine what the party was and, because of what it was, what it proposed to do, for Felipe González it was equally important to have at his disposal a homogeneous, seamless instrument with which to carry out the new tasks.

Thus, at the end of the Extraordinary Congress, Felipe González had reason to feel satisfied. He had been re-elected as secretary-general and acclaimed by a mass of cheering delegates. The PSOE was, at last, mature. Behind him lay a self-confessedly Marxist party

which had managed to establish its hegemony over the left as a whole and which had won over a sizeable wedge of the electorate. That was sufficient to situate the PSOE in the prominent position it occupied in the summer of 1979, although not enough to enable it to govern, especially if it intended to do so alone. After the September congress, however, having recovered the sceptre and his position at the head of what was now an explicitly non-Marxist party, Felipe González could proceed, without internal opposition, to the elimination of all ambiguity with regard to the character and aims of the party. *En passant*, he could also jettison the leftist ballast which, in his opinion, impeded the ship's progress.

Here was a party which had successively overcome its inferiority with respect to the Communists, resolved the dispersion of the socialist clan, gained the allegiance of more than five million voters, established a solid internal homogeneity, and appointed an undisputed leader. All was now set fair for it also to achieve an absolute majority in Parliament. For this to happen all that was needed was the addition of disintegration of UCD to the conversion of the PSOE into what González termed the evocation of tranquillity and security for the man in the street. This did not really depend on the Socialists, but in the Spanish political system of the time, it was still possible for things that did not depend on the Socialists to happen. And that, in effect, was one of the things that occurred in 1981. The repercussions of the PSOE of the collapse of UCD were decisive for the former's conception of itself as the substitute party and for the definition of its modernizing objectives. The most important result, however, was that, in October 1982, Felipe González was able to see the efficacy of the oil which he had so diligently applied to his party during the summer of 1979.