

## The Concept 'party' in Spain in the 19th century. The influence of English, French and German writers

During the 19th century a series of institutional changes accompanied by periods of crisis took place in Spain causing an important conceptual development. As it happened in France in the case of the fundamental concept of liberalism, as Jörn Leonhard shows in his study on this semantic field<sup>1</sup>, the social and political instability increased in Spain the necessity of concepts in order to organize the new experiences, to project expectations and to work as identification at an ideological and political level. The concept *party* in Spain is inserted in that process of transformation that caused semantic displacements linked with political and social history. In particular, modern parliamentary and constitutional dynamics influenced in a decisive way the transformation of *party* during the 19th century. Koselleck expressed it in his introduction to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. He wrote that the *Begriffsgeschichte* "fragt ausdrücklich nach dem jeweils epochalen Evidenzwandel, wie er sich sprachlich in den Begriffen artikuliert hat"<sup>2</sup>.

The dictionary of the *Real Academia de la Lengua* of 1791 reflects the existing plurality of denominations used to talk about political groups as the voice *faction* verifies, one of whose meanings indicates that it is "the same as a *pandilla* (gang), *parcialidad* or *partido* (party) in the communities or bodies". *Bandería*, *secta* (*sect*) and *escuela* (*school*) among others are to be added to these terms. All of them are well-known terms that acquiring new shades become *neologisms of sense*. As we know, the use will progressively differentiate the concept *party* from the rest. Nevertheless, not all the denominations used by the contemporaries to designate the incipiente political groups have the same importance. *Party* acquires from the beginning preeminence in the use as opposed to the rest of terms with connotations in which progressively a positive or neutral sense predominates. Indeed its importance turns this term to one subject of the political reflection. Nevertheless, in this process of terminological concretion by the route of the differentiation not all the mentioned voices above deserve the effort of their comparison with *party*. *Parcialidad*, for example, is used mainly throughout all century XIX without colliding with *party*. It is the closest to a perfect synonymous of *party*. On the contrary, *escuela*, *facción* and *bandería*, with negative or neutral connotations are opposed to *party*, specially *faction*. It has to be stand out that the indistinct use of the terms usually corresponds to critical authors with political and social division within the community, whereas the differentiation process is impeded by those who defend the necessity of parties or accept them as inevitable. Although it is common that an author who delimits the sense of *party* by opposition to other terms usually chooses *faction* as *contrast term*, *bandería* and *pandillaje* are used most frequently during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to stand out the negative aspect of

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<sup>1</sup> Jörn Leonhard. *Liberalismus. Zur historischen Semantik eines europäischen Deutungsmusters*. Oldenbourg Verlag, München, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> R. Koselleck, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1972-1997, vol. I, Einleitung, p. XIX.

every political division. The preference of *faction* is explained by its tradition in the historiography and political works, which has its origin in Rome. *Factio*, *faction*, *Faktion* belong, in short, to the conceptual universe of the intellectual Europe.

Carl von Rotteck saw in the partisan fight the cause of the linguistic confusion of his time (1837). In our case, the confrontation between different political groups gives rise to a situation that is in certain way different. We agree with von Rotteck when he accuses the proliferation of parties to be responsible of a process of concurrence of definitions that differ being sometimes incompatible. Nevertheless, this same dynamics that leads to the linguistic confusion simultaneously contributes to specify the sense of *party* and to outline its semantic limits. The term *party* in the beginning indetermined, equivalent to *faction*, acquires gradually more and more familiar notes to the current reader. Another factor that influences its semantic evolution is the instrumental character of the *thing* the concept means. The parties are and they are conceived as an a means for political participation. In this sense it has many things in common with the physical objects, more susceptible to be apprehended and analyzed empirically, which contrasts with those terms that express ideas with a greater level of abstraction. One of the factors that favors its development is, therefore, the less ideological density of the concept. This is a factor of a linguistic type determined by the relation between the significant and the meaning, to which two historical factors are added in the Spanish case: the political polarization that arises in the context of the two civil wars and the development from a parliamentary system<sup>3</sup>. The war with the *carlistas* impels among the liberals the necessity to find a term with a positive content to stress the negative character of the opponent.

Part of the European tradition, the reflection on parties that took place in Spain during century XIX is linked to which takes place in other European countries what does not mean that they are simultaneous. Rather happens the opposite. The stages of conceptual development differ in each country due to the particular social and political context and their own tradition. Nevertheless, it is possible to speak of a relatively parallel development in which the foreign intellectual influences must be consider. The native contributions to the reflection on parties are characterized, except for outstanding exceptions as the work of Andrés Borrego, to lack of conceptual precision and to consist in a few notes that do not get to form a theoretical frame. There are, therefore, only a few contributions dedicated specifically to the analysis of the political parties. Nevertheless, this statement loses its validity as we arrived to the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During this period articles totally or partially dedicated to parties increase considerably becoming more patent the explicit influence of foreign sources impeling the reflection on the parties in Spain.

The reception of the english works developed throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Bolingbroke, Hume, Locke and Burke among others influenced in a positive or at least neutral consideration of parties. With the French Revolution, however, the balance inclined towards a negative vision of *party* reinforcing the identification with *faction*. Ibáñez de la Rentería and Campomanes exemplifies in each case one of the previous circumstances. The first one influenced by the English doctrine, the latter one by the development of the French Revolution. The influence of english writers in de la Rentería is appraised in his distinction between *party* and *faction* and in the necessity that parties should not represent the particular interest. To the perception of the revolutionary chaos there is to add a set of elements that contributed in the following

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years still more to the rejection of every kind of division: the War of Independence against Napoleon, the scholastic tradition of *bonum commune* and an individualistic conception of society, that found its more influential political expression in the idea of *volonté général* of Rousseau<sup>4</sup>, are those factors. How the context of the War of Independence favored the negative sense of party is appraised clearly in the answer of the Council of Castile to the *Junta Central* (Central Meeting), the Council of Castile rejected to summon to Cortes the third state because it favors the formation of “parties and factions which would damage the kingdom”<sup>5</sup>.

In the years that mediate between the first absolutist restoration and the liberal Triennium (1815-1820) a displacement in the sense of party is appreciated. We distinguish two perspectives on parties within liberals in this period: a first group close to jacobinism identifies *party* and *faction*; a second group represented by Flórez Estrada (*Representación hecha a S.M.C. el Señor D. Fernando VII en defensa de las Cortes* of 1818) distinguishes between *faction*, a pejorative term used to designate the *serviles* (absolutist group), and *party*, for liberals and frenchified. In spite of the opinion represented by Flórez Estrada, during the Liberal Triennium (1820-1823) it predominates within liberals the negative sense of *party* identified with *faction*. Nevertheless, in this context of general rejection Alcala Galiano and Agustín Argüelles, both good connoisseurs of the english parliamentary system, reflected on a two-party system. Galiano defended the necessity of ideologically defined political groups in order to avoid the fluctuation of the votes. Argüelles gave the first definition of *party* in Spain, parties were composed by “people who, divided in opinions, form diverse classes”<sup>6</sup>. Differences that could be substantial or secondary, as in the case of *moderados* (moderate, influenced by Guizot and Cousin) and *exaltados* (raised), the two groups in which liberals were divided. Parties were essential for the survival of a free nation. The term opposition also evolves semantically during the Triennium. In the speech mentioned before, Argüelles defends that for the existence of an opposition in the parliament is required the compatibility between the position of Prime Minister and the parliamentarian one allowing in this way the formation of a ministerial party and a opponent party.

The rejection of the division within liberalism is also observed in the prologue of Joaquín Lumbreras in his translation of the opuscle that Thomas Gordon dedicated to parties and factions, published in 1840<sup>7</sup>. Lumbreras uses the terms *party* and *faction* as synonymous to talk about political groups, that in the Spanish context negative as much in the society as in the parliament. He indicates the link between the division of Spain in parties and factions and the existence of a constitution and a representative government. Nevertheless, he considers an unfortunate error to think that it is inevitable the link between representative government and party. The interests of the nation faced those of the parties, that defend “semi-public” interests, are better shaped in a parliament without parties. As Gordon, Lumbreras follows Rousseau when considering the law like the expression of the general will. The variety of opinions, in conclusion, does not end inevitably in a partisan division. The only important thing is to be a good spanish citizen and not to contribute to the division.

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<sup>4</sup> “il importe [...] pour avoir bien lénoncé de la volonté générale, qu'il n'y ait pas de société partielle dans l'Etat, et que chaque citoyen n'opine que d'après lui”, en *Contrat social*, II, 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Consulta del Consejo de Castilla a la Junta Central* –Madrid, 8 de octubre de 1808- in Manuel Fernández Martín, *Derecho Parlamentario español*, v. I, Madrid, Publicaciones del Congreso de los Diputados, 1992, p. 414.

<sup>6</sup> DS, v. II, n.º. 109, 24-05-1822, p. 1543.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Gordon, *Discurso sobre los partidos y facciones*, Madrid, 1840.

More than two decades later Luis M<sup>a</sup> Pastor stands out by the modernity of his statements on the effects that parties have in the elections and in the parliamentary system<sup>8</sup>. In both cases the influence is positive. First, parties generate a reduction in the complexity of elections and parliaments thanks to the discipline they impose to their members limiting in that way the discussions to essential aspects and accelerating the process of decision making. The rivalry also has positive consequences, allows the reciprocal control and stimulates the competition for the support of the voters promoting the progress. Persuasion and propaganda are “acceptable and compatible with the electoral freedom”. As the author recognizes the influence of John Stuart Mill is very important in his account. Nevertheless, partisan activity is legitimated, but for the party which wins the elections. The government must not favour partial interests, that eventually lead to the destruction of parties and the representative system.

We have already indicated above that during the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the reception is richer a wider. Bluntschli, Stahl, Rohmer, Minghetti and Holtzendorf among others had become a basic reference in Spain in the reflection on parties. The Restauración (1874-) of the monarchy after a short republican government leads to the creation of a two-party system characterized by the agreed alternation of the liberal and conservative parties. The difference between theory and the practice of the parties causes a critic reaction that reaches from the antiparlamentarianism to the defense of an authentic parliamentary system. Specially Minghetti and Bluntschli will be used as theoretical support in this critic. Figueroa and Torres, for example, agrees with the statement of Minghetti that relates necessarily cabinet government with party government, considering this equivalence one of the greater defects of the parliamentary system. Most of the abuses that take place in the parliamentary system have they origin in that equivalence. Under party government Figueroa y Torres means “a Government that it is not the expression of the majority of the country; Government, therefore, fictitious and antinational”<sup>9</sup>. Finally the problems derived from the system are inherent to he himself, that is to say, that they cannot be eradicated.

Another topic that acquires importance is the classification of parties. M. Moya following Azcárate<sup>10</sup> rejects the classifications of parties described by Stahl, Rohmer and Bluntschli and classifies the parties according to the aims of the State, its organization and the way in which it must fulfil its aims<sup>11</sup>. Jose del Perojo in another article<sup>12</sup> puts forward a description of the political parties based on the book of Bluntschli “*Charakter und Geist to der politischen Parteien*” (1869).

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<sup>8</sup> Luis María Pastor, *Las elecciones. Sus vicios. La influencia moral del gobierno*, Madrid, 1863.

<sup>9</sup> Conde de Romanones, *El Régimen parlamentario o los gobiernos de gabinete* (1886), in *Obras Completas*, Madrid, Plus Ultra, p. 151.

<sup>10</sup> Gumersindo de Azcárate, *Los partidos* (1877), in *La República norte-americana según el profesor Bryce*, Madrid 1891, p. 173-174.

<sup>11</sup> M. Moya, Legalidad de los partidos, in *Revista Europea*, 23-03-1873, n° 265, p. 373-381.

<sup>12</sup> José del Perojo, Teoría de los partidos políticos, in *Revista Europea*, 25-07-1875, n° 74, p. 121-128.