

# A different perspective on the Catalan rebellion

Via [Sin Permiso](#)

About the book Letter to a Spanish Republican

In a few weeks, it will be four years since the Catalan revolt shook the Kingdom of Spain. These were events that determined political life and, although their repercussions now seem to have been dampened, the causes that provoked them remain unresolved. And it is well known that unsolved problems tend, in one way or another, to reappear. Of the very prolific literary and research production on the Catalan rebellion, the book *Carta a un republicano español* (Letter to a Spanish Republican) offers a different perspective, has a defined target audience and a specific goal. It was written by Jordi Serrano (Sabadell, 1958), historian and dean of the Universitat Progressista d'Estiu de Catalunya (UPEC), and published by Bellaterra Edicions.

Most of the published literature has focused on recounting the events of October 2017, the reasons behind this explosion of democratic mobilization, as well as the different elements for taking stock. The main thread of the text highlights the republican character of the national emancipation movement, with the initiative in the hands of the independence movement; it rejects those who seek to reduce it to its identitarian character and, above all, raises the need for a republican perspective, both for the Catalan sovereignty and independence movements and for leftists and democrats across the state.

The book has as an additional interest the account of the different attempts to tackle the Catalan national problem throughout history and how they were all linked to popular, left-wing and republican political expressions; from the First

Republic with Pi i Margall, who wrote: "We will organize the kingdom on the basis of a republican federation." Also in the early days of the labor movement in Catalonia, social, democratic and national demands were always in unison and were very present in the revolutionary effervescence of the 1930s. The author quotes Andreu Nin, who in 1934 considered "the proclamation of the Catalan Republic as an act of enormous revolutionary transcendence. And he was also a key element in the anti-Franco mobilization. Manuel Sacristán, a renowned militant intellectual of the PSUC, wrote: "Only the passage through this seemingly utopian demand for full and radical self-determination, with the right to separation and state formation, will give us a clear and good situation."

This historical review also includes the attempts to address the problem during the Transition, especially the "asymmetric federalism" promoted by Pascual Maragall (which in practice represented an alliance between ERC and PSC), which the PSOE itself took it upon itself to liquidate. Because the pro-independence impulse is the expression of the failure of the other routes, and for this very reason it has a republican character, a break with the monarchical regime. What the book presents for debate is that the answer to the different problems in the Kingdom of Spain needs a republican perspective, in Catalonia and all of Spain.

Any reader can feel interested in the text: they will learn details of the most massive mobilization process that has occurred in Europe in recent decades; they will learn about the history of republicanism in Spain and Catalonia; they will be irritated by the corruption accumulated by the Spanish and Catalan right; and they will find dozens of arguments to convince them of the need to end the Monarchy.

But the author is interested in a specific target audience: democrats and leftists who feel Republican, either in practice or in thought, and who, for one reason or another, did not feel concerned about the Catalan rebellion, did not understand

it, or even opposed it. He offers them facts and fraternal arguments to convince them that "Catalonia is the advance guard of republicanism in Spain. Catalonia dared to defy the monster, any left-wing person in Spain would have to sympathize with it."

This is a militant book. It is not just an enumeration of events, but seeks to engage the reader in the search for a republican future, we insist, as an answer to the Catalan problem and to that of Spain. To move in this direction, one of its conclusions is: "A republican hegemony must be achieved if one wants to solve the Spanish problem."

### **A Warning**

In the detailed, and sometimes overwhelming, account of events, special attention is devoted to showing the alliance of the powers that be in the state, from the King to the judges, police and employers' associations, as a reaction to Catalan republicanism and the horror of the ruling classes that this republicanism could spread to the entire state. For this very reason, this Charter is also a warning to the left and the democrats not to look the other way, because what is at stake concerns all of us.

It is not difficult to understand – given the reaction of the monarchist powers – the "let's get them," which means defeating those who rebel and limiting rights and freedoms for the entire population, not just Catalonia. The reaction may go even further. In the book is this quote, "Spain is irrevocable. The Spaniards can decide about secondary things; but about the very essence of Spain, they have nothing to decide." We could hear this from any representative of the right, of VOX, of the PP or C's, but it comes from a distant past that seems to have been revived. It is a statement by the founder of Spanish fascism, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, from 1934. What is at stake does not only affect Catalonia, nor only the territorial organization of the different peoples and

regions that make up the Kingdom of Spain. What is at stake is the ruling classes' idea of the state and freedoms, to curtail or deny them (the Spanish have nothing to decide about essential things) or to reverse the long and deep crisis of the current regime through a republican alliance of the different political forces of the left and the peoples. There is no future in clinging to the status quo.

The book begins with an excellent prologue by Xosé Manuel Beiras (it is surprising that it is announced in such minimal letters on the cover) presented as a response letter to Carta a un republicano español. It is, in fact, a dialogue between republicans in which Beiras contributes experiences that enrich the basis for understanding the "exercise of a cardinal republican principle: fraternity. The principle that all free citizens, democrats and republicans in ox skin should, or rather, must practice."

After any historical experience, it is often difficult to draw the balance sheet and lessons to define new perspectives. Kristin Ross, author of several books on the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871, puts it this way, "The political struggle itself produces new conditions, changes social relations, changes the participants of the event and their own way of thinking and speaking; the struggle itself creates new political forms, new ways of being, and a new theoretical understanding of those forms. The dialectic between the lived and the conceived [...] is a true dialectic, in which something cannot come to be thought until something else has happened." (Communal Luxury. The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune). This Letter to a Spanish Republican represents a contribution to taking stock of the Catalan rebellion, a reflection on what must be done, and a commitment to another perspective.