

Progress or **total** decline

After many local and national votes, demos by millions of people, a democratically elected parliamentary majority and a pro-government, Catalonia is about to regain the national freedom lost more than 300 years ago. However, Spain continues to deny the right to self-determination, unlike the cases of Scotland and Quebec. In this way, the Spanish state, heir of the Franco regime, shows its anti-democratic nature.

But what is behind this? Spain's unemployment rate stood at 18% in April, 10 points above the EU average; because of the foreseen depletion of the public pensions reserve fund, this year more indebtedness is needed, when public debt on GDP is already around 100%! All of these are symptoms of a structural evil.

The international economy has suffered the Great Recession, but there are differential factors in Spain, especially the real estate bubble that burst in 2008. It is not the only country where a real estate bubble existed, but it seems that the main culprits, the governments of the PP, the PSOE and the Spanish financial and economic oligarchy neither changed the underlying economic model nor

want to change it. Catalonia's independence would force them to change this inefficient and corrupt economic model, since the Spanish state could not count annually on 8% of the Catalan GDP to compensate for its lack of economic efficiency. So, they are against independence, apart from being anti-democratic and Spanish imperialists.

An example of economic inefficiency? The hypercentralist Spanish state conceived a high speed rail radial network to connect all the provincial capitals with the megacapital in less than four hours. And it did not take into account the economic rationality of this huge investment. Result: Spain has more kilometres of high-speed railway network than France, Germany, Japan and the US, but public debt has skyrocketed and no line is profitable.

On the other hand, a very necessary infrastructure for economic development such as the Mediterranean Rail Corridor, which links the centre of Europe with North Africa along the Mediterranean coast, has been postponed for years, mainly for political reasons: it does not go through Madrid. Well, the Government of Spain now wants the Mediterranean

Rail Corridor to go through Madrid, when it is over 300 km from the coast. But the economic reasons are not very important in Spain. They may think: "The inefficiencies will be borne by the colonies (Catalan speaking Mediterranean regions)." Thus, the Spanish economic model leads the colonies like Catalonia into total decline, as development of the megacapital Madrid is the priority. Thus, Catalonia's independence is the only way to develop the potential of the Catalan economy.

This will also be positive for the EU, since the strong growth of the Catalan economy, once the huge fiscal deficit with Spain is eliminated and with an adequate economic policy, this will benefit surrounding regions. The Catalan Republic will be a dynamic hub in southern Europe and firms based in Catalonia will benefit from the change. We must not forget that the Catalan independence movement is pro-European and open to the world. As for the Spanish state, the loss of the colonial income it has obtained so far from Catalonia will force it to improve its economic model and to be more efficient and less corrupt. Europe and democracy will also win.

RANDOM THOUGHTS

TERRY PARRIS Writer

Past and present **side-by-side**

Has it ever struck you how fortunate we are living in Catalonia? Of course, we love the mountains and forests, the coasts with their sparkling waves, the vibrant cities... Can there be anything else?

Yes, there can and is. In Catalonia we live with every modern convenience and technical innovation of the 21st century. We communicate with our Whatsapps, Skype and emails. Yet, alongside this, if we live in a rural area, there are neighbours living in quasi-medieval houses: animals on the ground floor to heat the living quarters above, kitchens still using open fires for cooking, vast entrance doors never locked.... These houses have pock-marked walls from when, until fairly re-

cently, the local priest would throw salt on the walls to protect the house from bad harvests.

Quite often, visiting a friendly farmer's wife, I interrupt her Skyping her daughter, a scientific researcher, living in the USA. On other days she may be in the middle of a group of family members making sausages to last through the winter.

Yesterday, this living history was personified when a grandson and I visited a beekeeper in the mountains nearby to buy some honey. Up we went a rocky road for kilometres! As we arrived, we could see the beehives on the steep slopes. Jaume and Pilar greeted us from the door of a house that must have been built in the 1700s. There was a well

outside for water. As I watched their cats and kittens cavorting happily, it reminded me of a childhood rhyme:

Ding dong bell
Pussy's in the well
Who put her in?
Little Tommy Green!
Who pulled her out?
Little Johnnie Stout!

But inside, Pilar had the TV on – a great wide screen – next to a phone, next to a huge tub of honey. On the way home, I reflected that this September could have been, intrinsically, any September in centuries past. We, in Catalonia, have the immense fortune of living in history. The past is right with us – now!

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"The Mossos d'Esquadra are a first division police force, comparable with any police force in the world"
Joaquim Forn, Catalan interior minister

The Catalan police's handling of the terrorist attacks and their aftermath was efficient, professional and rapid. Let's hope it convinces the Spanish government to fund the force properly and allow them the same access to intelligence as other forces in Spain.