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Miguel Primo de Rivera y Urquijo: A Forgotten Protagonist of Spain's Transition to Democracy, 1964–1978

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Historians have traditionally studied Spain's transition to democracy (1975–8) through the point of view of its protagonists, especially King Juan Carlos I and Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez. The figure of Miguel Primo de Rivera y Urquijo (1934–2018), who despite being José Antonio's nephew and Franco's protégé defended the Political Reform Act which restored democracy, is one that however has barely received attention from historians. This is mainly due to the lack of sources on him, apart from his memoirs, published in 2002. The unprecedented access to his personal archive reveals that Primo de Rivera had a crucial role in the transition: although apparently an outright Francoist, he dedicated all of his efforts to accomplishing the succession of Juan Carlos and the eventual restoration of democracy. This paper rediscovers his figure, revealing him to be a convinced democrat and a crucial member of the strategy that brought down Francoism.

On 20 November 1975, General Francisco Franco, Spain's dictator for almost forty years, died after a long agony. In the final days of his autumn, the old patriarch is believed to have sighed for the end, saying: 'It is so difficult to die'.¹ Franco was succeeded by Prince Juan Carlos, grandson of the last Bourbon King of Spain, Alfonso XIII. Juan Carlos and his entourage began a delicate process of stealth reformism that brought down the dictatorship from within and restored democracy to Spain. Traditionally Spain's transition to democracy (1975–8) has been studied from the point of view of the elite orchestrating the process.² Classic historiography focuses mainly on Juan Carlos I, Torcuato Fernández-Miranda and Adolfo Suárez. From this central triad of study have diverged other histories also focused on 'political figures' such as Manuel Fraga, Alfonso Osorio or communist leader Santiago Carrillo.³ In terms of methodologies, these histories were crafted largely taking account of politicians' memoirs, on their recollection of events. Perhaps the most illustrative example of this is

¹ Victoria Prego, *Así se hizo la transición* (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1997), 383–5; José Luis Palm, *El paciente de El Pardo: Crónica de una agonía imprevisible* (Madrid: Cersa Ediciones, 2004) (please note that all translations from the original Spanish are my own).

² Walther L. Bernecker, 'Monarchy and Democracy: The Political Role of King Juan Carlos in the Spanish Transition', *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 1 (1998): 65–84; Charles Powell, *El piloto del Ccambio: El rey, la monarquía y la transición a la democracia* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1991); Georgina Blakeley, 'Vestir el muñeco: Torcuato Fernández-Miranda, la herestética y la ley para la reforma política', *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas* 154 (2016): 3–20; Helena Varela-Guinot, 'The Legalization of the Spanish Communist Party: Elites, Public Opinion and Symbols in the Spanish Transition', *International Journal of Political Economy* 20, no. 2 (1990): 28–44.

³ Bernecker, 'Monarchy and Democracy'; Ana Escauriaz Escudero, 'Alfonso Osorio García: Pensamiento político de un democristiano en la última etapa del Franquismo, 1970–1971', *Investigaciones Históricas. Época Moderna y Contemporánea* 38, no. 38 (2018): 507–38; Blakeley, 'Vestir el muñeco'; Varela-Guinot, 'The Legalization of the Spanish Communist Party'. On Carrillo, the best biography is probably Paul Preston's *The Last Stalinist: The Life of Santiago Carrillo* (London: Harper Collins, 2014).

journalist Victoria Prego's *Así se hizo la transición* (1997), a chronicle of the process based on extensive interviews with the people in power at the time.

One of the main criticisms to this type of history is that it has made the history of the elites tantamount to the history of the regime change process, something which neglects the role of non-elite actors and non-individual actors. New historiographical trends have tried to reverse this by widening the methodological lens, focusing on the study of the transition's *forces profundes*, such as terrorism, international re-alignment and transnational socio-political movements.⁴ One of the most interesting examples of this new scholarship is Charles Powell's analysis of the transition as part of Samuel Huntington's third wave of democratisation.⁵ Another perspective is that of historical memory: in past years, historians have argued that Spanish transition was a manoeuvre by the elite and for the elite, and that due to this tacit 'pact of forgetting' (*pacto de olvido*) Spain did not experience post-dictatorship intergenerational justice like Argentina or Chile.⁶

This article returns to the traditional study of the political figure, focusing on Miguel Primo de Rivera y Urquijo (1934–2018), third duke of Primo de Rivera, thanks to the unprecedented access to his personal archive.⁷ Returning to this traditional approach, this article will provide a new perspective on the transition 'from above' and will further illustrate the role of the elite in promoting regime change. Whilst acknowledging that the transition did not only take place because of the elite's will but also due to a combination of social, economic and political events, it seeks to bring into the light the role of an individual who was central to the process but who, nonetheless, has not been widely considered by the scholarship. The case of Primo, furthermore, provides an insight into the actual democratic conviction of one of the key figures of the transition, refuting existing accounts about his last-minute opportunistic support for democratic transition.

Primo de Rivera belonged to an important family of the Franco regime. His uncle, José Antonio Primo de Rivera (1903–36), had founded the fascist party Falange Española in 1932 on which Franco had later built his own heterogeneous *Movimiento Nacional*. Republicans rid Franco of a charismatic political rival by murdering José Antonio in 1936, but the dictator still used the powerful imagery of the martyred Falange leader to bind together the different ideological factions (fascists, Carlists, conservatives) within his *Movimiento*. The Primo de Rivera family played a key role in Franco's propaganda, representing a sort of blood alliance between two ideological elements (Franco's military conservatism and José Antonio's interwar fascism) which were actually at loggerheads.⁸

Primo served as mayor of Jerez de la Frontera (1965–71), *procurador* [MP] at the Cortes (1965–77), member of the Council of the *Movimiento Nacional* (1971–7), member of the Council of the Realm (1971–7) and senator by royal appointment (1977–9), but he is best remembered for his role in passing the Political Reform Act (November 1976), which brought the regime to a juridical end

⁴ Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca and Paloma Aguilar, 'Terrorist Violence and Popular Mobilization: The Case of Spanish Transition to Democracy', *Politics & Society* 37, no. 3 (2009): 428–53; Charles Powell, 'The United States and Spain: From Franco to Juan Carlos', in *Spain Transformed: The Late Franco Dictatorship, 1957–75*, ed. Nigel Townson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 227–47. A good collection of essays reflecting on political, social, diplomatic and economic transitions in the late Franco period is Nigel Townson, ed., *Spain Transformed: The Late Franco Dictatorship, 1959–75* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁵ Charles Powell, 'International Aspects of Democratization: The Case of Spain', in *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas*, ed. Laurence Whitehead (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 285–314.

⁶ Paloma Aguilar, 'Collective Memory of the Spanish Civil War: The Case of the Political Amnesty in the Spanish Transition to Democracy', *Democratization* 4, no. 4 (1997): 88–109; Jo Labanyi, 'The Politics of Memory in Contemporary Spain', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 9, no. 2 (2008): 119–25; Josep María Tamarit Sumalla, 'Transition, Historical Memory and Criminal Justice in Spain', *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 9, no. 3 (2011): 729–52; Madeleine Davis, 'Is Spain Recovering Its Memory? Breaking the "Pacto del Olvido"', *Human Rights Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2005): 858–80.

⁷ MPRU's archive is not open to the public. The files have been provided directly by the Duke of Primo de Rivera on the personal request of the author.

⁸ On the relation between José Antonio's Falange and Francoism see Ismael Saz, *Fascismo y Franquismo* (Valencia: Universidad de Valencia, 2004).

and called for democratic elections. It was shocking that a Primo de Rivera supported the institutional suicide of the regime; in the words of Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, it was ‘fascinating and paradigmatic’.⁹ However, this defence of democracy is not something that has attracted significant scholarly attention. Primo is often mentioned only in generalist accounts of the transition for anecdotal purposes – he was Don Juan Carlos’s long-time friend and his memoirs constitute a rich source of stories.¹⁰ His political role in the transition remains largely unstudied. A notable exception is Tom Burns, who in his study of Juan Carlos’s early reign did point to the crucial role of Primo, whom he argued had used his influence on the Francoist entourages to ensure ‘Juan Carlos’s ascension to the throne, the transformation of the Francoist regime and the consolidation of the monarchy’.¹¹ Nonetheless, even though Burns reveals more about Primo’s role than other Hispanists, his account still lacks a detailed analysis of Primo’s politics and actions during the transition.

Generally, historians have failed to nuance and contextualise Primo’s role, merely explaining his actions with regards to a broader political and personal context.¹² The only biography of Primo, *Del Franquismo a la Reforma* (2019) by Spanish historian Manuel Ruiz Romero, is largely based on Primo’s tenure as mayor of Jerez, using the city’s archives. For his role in the transition, Ruiz Romero, just like Sánchez-Cuenca, relied on Primo’s memoirs, *No a las dos Españas*, published in 2002. Seldom do memoirs provide a full account of events. No author can overcome the natural limits of human memory or escape the temptation to revindicate or justify past actions. Primo is no exception. His memoirs were published twenty-five years after the transition and at a complicated time for the author: in the long wilderness of the Socialist government (1982–96), he fell into oblivion and it is well known that one of his great friends, the king, did not bring him back from it. (Whether Don Juan Carlos could do so or not is a different question, but already in 1978 Primo noted that he was beginning to suffer ‘in my own flesh . . . the rather common ups and downs of His Majesty towards those loyal to him’).¹³

There are few documents to refute the claims made in *No a las dos Españas*; Ruiz Romero recognised that this lack of ‘new historiographical elements’ makes it difficult to nuance Primo’s political role and intellectual relationship with Falangism and democracy.¹⁴ This might be the reason why his conclusions are very similar to other historians’. He presents Primo as a pragmatist reformer, a man who ‘progressively distanced himself from the more orthodox sectors’ and sought to navigate ‘an intermediary way’ between radical reformists (*rupturistas*) and Franco devotees.¹⁵ This is more or less the same portrayal that Primo made of himself in his memoirs, the one which other historians have stuck to. Julio Gil Pecharrómán, for example, interpreted Primo as a ‘blue reformist’ (*reformista azul*) – a young member of the regime who believed promoting democratisation was the only chance of taking political power from the hands of the previous generation of leaders.¹⁶

Thus whilst the role of Primo in the transition is known to Spanish historians, the details of his politics and the evolution of his political thought remain unstudied. This article seeks to fill in this gap by interrogating Primo’s personal private papers, to which the Primo de Rivera family has allowed access for the first time. The archive includes several folders (going back to 1964) containing handwritten notes (sometimes scribbled on the back of official papers), personal diary entries and written

⁹ Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, *Atado y mal atado: El suicidio institucional del Franquismo y el surgimiento de la democracia* (Barcelona: Alianza, 2014), 298. Franco made the Primo de Riveras one of the most important political families of the regime. Primo’s uncle, Miguel, served as minister and ambassador to London; his aunt, Pilar, was created a countess in 1960, was one of the few female members of the Cortes and was made head of the Women’s Section of the Falange.

¹⁰ The most repeated one is that when Primo told the prince in July 1969 that Franco had chosen him as his successor, both friends were so excited that they jumped in the swimming pool, Primo still wearing his morning suit.

¹¹ Tom Burns, *Conversaciones sobre el Rey* (Madrid: Plaza y Janés, 1995), 173–86.

¹² Paul Preston, *Juan Carlos: Steering Spain from Dictatorship to Democracy* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005); Powell, *El piloto del cambio*; Raymond Carr and Juan Pablo Fusi, *Spain: Dictatorship to Democracy* (London: Harper Collins, 1993).

¹³ Miguel Primo de Rivera y Urquijo Archive, Madrid [hereafter MPRU Arch.] 05/sin nombre, fol. 21, 7 Mar. 1978.

¹⁴ Ruiz Romero, *Del Franquismo a La Reforma*, 157–8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Julio Gil Pecharrómán, ‘Esperando a la parca: El Franquismo en la expectativa del postfranquismo (1969–1975)’, *Aportes: Revista de Historia Contemporánea* 32, no. 93 (2017): 197.

reflections, letters that have not seen the light of day until now, and even newspaper clippings with underlined paragraphs – which give a sense of what Primo was interested in. This brings forth a new body of sources to contextualise Primo's role in the transition and reveal new details about his political trajectory and the evolution of his political convictions. This article will thus seek to answer the following questions: what was the role of Primo in securing the transition from above? What do Primo's papers illustrate about the complicated relationship between Juancarlist reformists and the Francoist high echelons from 1969 onwards?

As it will be seen in this article, these sources reveal that from the beginning of his political career in the 1960s, Primo clashed with the world of the Falange and supported the restoration of democracy through the succession of Prince Juan Carlos. This rupture with Falangism and early support for Juan Carlos, as well as his actions in the key years of the transition (1975–6), show that he had always supported and worked towards a transition and that he was not a 'possibilist', as Ruiz Romero and Gil Pecharromán assumed, nor part of what Ángel Ruiz Carnicer argued was a group of young Franco devotees who claimed in their memoirs to have been 'democrats *avant la lettre*'. Sánchez Cuenca too follows this argument about Primo being a Falangist who, writing in democratic times, attempted to 'rationalise his past', presenting himself as a long-time committed democrat.¹⁷

In order to show this evolution, this article first explores Primo's relation with the world of the Falange in the 1960s, as well as the clashes he had with two of the Falange's most important factions. The second section analyses his manoeuvres within the high echelons of the regime to support Juan Carlos before and after his designation as heir in 1969. The third section traces the details of Primo's role in the dismantling of Francoist institutions in 1975–6, focusing on his time as member the Council of the Realm and his role in designating Adolfo Suárez as prime minister. As will be seen, Primo's support for the transition was not an opportunistic turn happening after Franco's death, but rather a long-thought-out and long-envisioned political plan.

A Peculiar José Antonian: Primo de Rivera and the Falange

As previously stated, General Franco had an interest in keeping the Primo de Rivera family closely by his side for propagandistic reasons. Young Miguel became the dictator's protégé – 'the son Franco never had', he wrote in his memoirs – albeit deeply resenting it.¹⁸ Primo understood the regime used his family for its own propaganda purposes, trying to assert through them an ideological and spiritual connection with a mythical José Antonio. 'All my life people have tried to forcefully make me fit within the history of my elders', he wrote in 1976.¹⁹ In this he was the exception among his kin, for the Primo de Riveras sat comfortably within the structures of the regime: Pilar (José Antonio's sister) was leader of the Women's Section of the Falange and was, arguably, the only woman with a glimpse of power in Francoist Spain; Miguel (José Antonio's brother) had served as minister and ambassador to London.²⁰ Primo, however, rejected all of Franco's offers of entering politics.²¹ Diving into his personal archive, it is possible to see that because of this reluctance to embrace José Antonian mythology and Francoist positionings, Primo's relation with the world of the Falange was severely strained. This section illustrates the relation between Primo and Falangist ideology, and his clashes with its factions on account of his (hidden) democratic convictions.

In 1957, Franco replaced his Falangist ministers with technocrats belonging to the religious organisation Opus Dei. The new technocratic ministers would be the architects not only of the Spanish

¹⁷ Miguel Ángel Ruiz Carnicer, 'The Blue Factor: Falangist Political Culture under the Franco Regime and the Transition to Democracy, 1962–1977', in *From Franco to Freedom: The Roots of the Transition to Democracy in Spain, 1962–1982*, ed. Miguel Ángel Ruiz Carnicer (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2019), 52. See Sánchez-Cuenca, *Atado y mal atado*, 298.

¹⁸ Miguel Primo de Rivera y Urquijo, *No a las dos Españas: Memorias Políticas* (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 2002), 44.

¹⁹ Primo de Rivera to Antonio Izquierdo, 24 Nov. 1976, MPRU Arch. nn/Alcázar, fol. 2.

²⁰ On Pilar Primo see Wayne H. Bowen, 'Pilar Primo de Rivera and the Axis Temptation', *The Historian* 67, no. 1 (2005): 62–72.

²¹ Primo de Rivera y Urquijo, *No a las dos Españas*, 44–5.

economic miracle but also of the institutionalisation of the regime.²² One of the direct consequences of this was the decline of the regime's single-party, the *Movimiento Nacional* or *FET de las JONS*.²³ Despite the best efforts of various ministers-secretary generals, the new socioeconomic conditions made it an 'unrealisable ambition' for the *Movimiento* to preserve its monopoly over Spanish politics as it had done in the 1940s and 1950s.²⁴

As a result, the Falangist ideological 'family' within the *Movimiento* splintered into different factions. These groups were multiple and ideologically diverse, but for the research purposes of this article special attention will be given to the groupings Primo had most contact with. The first was the Francoist Falange, to which belonged the men the technocrats had ousted from power in 1957. They were critical of the 'defalangisation' of the regime but, as described by Gil Pecharromán, still 'sat comfortably within the Francoist orthodoxy of the *Movimiento*'.²⁵ The second group was formed by the Doctrinal Circles of José Antonio (*Círculos Doctrinales de José Antonio*; CDJA), which was part of the so-called 'independent falangism'. Their members at first tried to rebuild José Antonio's original national-syndicalist party, Falange Española, but soon turned to more radical and anti-regime positionings. In 1964, the Ministry of Interior banned the CDJA's newspaper *Es Así* and classified the organisation as subversive. The CDJA were soon forced to go underground, and henceforth were known as the 'outcast Falange' (*Falange proscrita*).²⁶

In his memoirs, Primo barely mentions the CDJA even though their paths crossed on various occasions. The section under that title in *No a la dos Españas* only contains a puzzling seven-page explanation of the original José Antonian doctrine from which one sole argument stands out: José Antonio's Falange was a long-gone project; it only made sense within the system of the Second Republic and there was no point in bringing it back.²⁷ But, 'the CDJA intended to recover that which was irreversibly lost', wrote Primo.²⁸ It is somewhat bizarre that in the section concerning the CDJA there is no actual mention of it but in this ending sentence. However, when contrasted with the sources in his archive, the meaning of this rather cryptic passage becomes clear: it referred to his clash with the CDJA in 1968. Primo basically ignored this clash and merely wrote revindicating José Antonio – an intellectual whose political thought, in his opinion, the CDJA had never understood.

Yet the CDJA defended a version of the José Antonian ideology, or 'José Antonism', that was not at all different from that of the 1930s: it was still based on anti-liberalism, anti-parliamentarism, hyper-nationalism, and authoritarianism. The CDJA affair evidenced that it was Primo who had a completely different understanding of what José Antonism actually meant. For him, it had nothing to do with following José Antonio's interwar fascism. This set him on the path of collision with the CDJA over the true meaning of 'José Antonism'.

Throughout the 1960s, members of the CDJA tried to get close to Primo, frequently asking him for money and political favours they thought he could provide on account of his family's position within the regime.²⁹ Primo usually evaded their demands, and as the CDJA began to diverge towards an anti-capitalist interpretation of José Antonio, he distanced himself even more from the organisation.

²² Gonzalo Caballero Miguez, 'El cambio institucional de la economía Española del Franquismo a la democracia: Un análisis histórico-institucional', *Política y Gobierno* 15, no. 2 (2008): 353–401.

²³ Falange Española, *Tradicionalista de las juntas de ofensiva sindicalista* (*Traditionalist Spanish Phalanx of the Councils of National Syndicalist Offensive*).

²⁴ Paul Preston, *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain* (London: Routledge, 2005), 6.

²⁵ Julio Gil Pecharromán, *La estirpe del camaleón: Una historia política de la derecha Española, 1937–2004* (Barcelona: Taurus, 2019), 170.

²⁶ Gil Pecharromán, *La estirpe del camaleón*, 164–8.

²⁷ Primo de Rivera y Urquijo, *No a las dos Españas*, 31–8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁹ For example, one of its members, Fernando de la Cámara, directly asked Primo to convince Franco to stop the persecution against the CDJA, offering him in exchange the presidency of a future Falangist party. Fernando de la Cámara to Primo de Rivera, 23 Sept. 1968, MPRU Arch. 02/CDJA–FES. On another occasion they asked Primo for 25,000 pesetas to bail out of jail a twenty-year-old member who had participated in a violent protest at the Complutense University. José Luis Arroyo to Primo de Rivera, 21 Jan. 1968, MPRU Arch. 02/CDJA–FES.

Primo despised any idea slightly revolutionary. In 1968, when the CDJA started to call for a ‘moral reorganisation’ in order to ‘end with the spivs and vipers that hinder the cleanness of our air [referring to the capitalists technocrats]’, he accused them of being ‘not even remotely close to José Antonism’.³⁰ In July 1968, he delivered a speech at the Casino Militar de Madrid in which he classified the CDJA as a ‘regressive’ force, and therefore not truly José Antonian.³¹ The members of the CDJA *junta* sent him a letter criticising his words and invited him to discuss these discrepancies with them.³² There is no record their encounter every took place (the CDJA operated almost clandestinely), but Primo’s archive holds a letter from one of the participants, Sigfredo Hillers, which provides a clear picture of some of the things that were said at the gathering. According to Hillers, Primo insulted the members of the CDJA, calling them ‘leaders of a schoolyard gang, lacking in logical rigor’. Hillers then accused him of ‘playing two different hands’, claiming to be a José Antonian whilst arguing that the Falange was dead and could not, and should not, be re-established.³³ ‘We thought there might have been a parallelism between José Antonio and yourself’, he wrote, ‘but you have chosen to collaborate [with the regime] for money’.³⁴ A similar clash took place in December 1971, only this time against Francoist Falangists and their weekly magazine *Fuerza Nueva*, which criticised Primo for abandoning traditional Falangism, thinking that ‘his name alone suffices to incarnate something as cherished and positive [as Falangism]’.³⁵

Whether pro-regime or subversive, the different worlds of the Falange rejected Primo’s interpretation of the José Antonian doctrine and accused him of being a traitor to his blood. It comes as no surprise that in 1981, looking back on the 1960s, Primo said: ‘They accused me of being a “red” during the “blue years” . . . They called me “the little red prince”’.³⁶ Ruiz Romero argues in his book that Primo had evolved from Falangist positions, ‘adapting himself to the context in a possibilist way’;³⁷ however, these sources reveal that there had been an ideological rupture between the ‘heir of José Antonio’ (de facto head of the family) and the world of the Falange in the 1960s.

Primo clashed with the various Falangist factions because he refused to accept their interpretation of Falangist ideology. However, the question remains of what *his* version of José Antonism really was about. The personal manuscripts he penned in late 1964 (when he became head of the family after the death of his uncle Miguel) help to uncover it. These personal texts, scruffily written down at a time of personal meditation, were not destined for anyone’s eyes and, it is fair to assume, constituted his own genuine opinion. They show that Primo did not progressively evolve towards democratic tendencies as Francoism came to an end but was a democrat from the very beginning of his career.

In the most significant text, *Blue Shirt (Camisa azul)*, Primo wrote about his decision never to wear again the traditional Falangist blue shirt – something quite significant for José Antonio’s nephew – because this symbol had become, he believed, the ‘uniform of upstarts who use it to hide their faked love for Spain’.³⁸ This represented something more than a mere criticism of regime Falangists: he believed the blue shirt represented the Falangism of the 1930s and that there was no sense in trying to implement those ideas in the Spain of the 1960s, as was the goal of both the CDJA and *Fuerza Nueva*. He actually believed this to be a ‘dangerous game’ and ‘nothing further from José Antonism’.³⁹ He defended the necessity of promoting a political transformation that had

³⁰ MPRU Arch. 02/CDJA–FES, ‘Frente Nacional de Alianza Libre, Circular no. 1, Dec. 1968.’ Primo de Rivera to Picazo, 9 Dec. 1968, MPRU Arch. 02/CDJA–FES.

³¹ MPRU Arch. 02/CDJA–FES, *Arriba*, 26 July 1968, 4.

³² Junta Directiva to Primo de Rivera, 16 Aug. 1968, MPRU Arch. 02/CDJA–FES; Junta Directiva to Primo de Rivera, 16 Aug. 1968, MPRU Arch. 02/CDJA–FES; *ibid.*, 20 Aug. 1968, MPRU Arch. 02/CDJA–FES.

³³ Hillers to Primo de Rivera, 6 Nov. 1968, MPRU Arch. 02/CDJA–FES.

³⁴ *Ibid.* (MPRU’s underlining).

³⁵ César Esquivas, *Fuerza Nueva*, 11 Dec. 1971, MPRU Arch. 06/Fuerza Nueva.

³⁶ ‘Miguel Primo de Rivera y Urquijo’, *Al Grano*, 23–29 Nov. 1981, MPRU Arch. nn/Alcázar.

³⁷ Ruiz Romero, *Del Franquismo a la reforma*, 157–8.

³⁸ *Camisa azul*, MPRU Arch.12/Escritos personales, fol. 28, 1.

³⁹ MPRU Arch. 05/sin nombre, fol. 50, 18 July 1978.

as an end the restoration of democracy; the trickiness of this is that he defended it using a language that revivified José Antonio.

Time goes by and changes everything. Men change too. Ideas are honed . . . it is imperative to march at the same pace as the Universe. Dynamism measures the progress of nations; staticity is the sign of backwardness and misery . . . Refusing the blue shirt is not just a physical act. It also implies changing, for the better, attitudes, discourses [and] symbols which might have been adequate back in their time but that have no place nowadays.⁴⁰

Primo envisioned a new José Antonism – believing it to be the original of his uncle – which sought to progress towards a more open society. He took José Antonio for a pioneer who had advocated for a revolutionary movement to radically transform Spain back in the 1930s. Being a José Antonian in the 1960s did not mean defending the same ideas as José Antonio but having the same spirit of renovation and political innovation Primo imagined he had had. On one occasion he made these ideas public. In December 1964, during the inauguration ceremony of a statue of José Antonio in Jerez, he claimed that the regime's propagandistic use of the founder's figure was tantamount to 'the second death of José Antonio. [José Antonism] has covertly been counterfeited with external habits and obsolete symbols and with an inefficient discourse that lacks the courage to see what is needed in these difficult times of transition'.⁴¹ In Primo's point of view, a true José Antonian would acknowledge the impossibility of furthering an interwar regime and would ease the transition to a new regime that gave the power back to the people. The 1964 texts uncover a break with both independent and regime forms of Falangist thinking. Primo went into politics in 1965 having a completely different vision of José Antonism than the one defended by the regime and demanded by the *Movimiento*. (Moreover, he became mayor of Jerez in 1965 but did not become the head of the *Movimiento* in the province, as was usual for mayors to do).⁴²

In an act of ideological contortionism, Primo made José Antonism tantamount to democratic progress, managing in this way to reconcile his own ideas with his family tradition: José Antonio's doctrine became what his heir made of it. In this sense, the last sentence of *Blue Shirt* acquires special significance: 'If José Antonio were alive and able to see this he would only have two options: do what I am about to do, or die again'.⁴³ What Primo was 'about to do' was to endorse a democratic monarchy and work towards its instauration in Spain.

The José Antonian Monarchist: Primo de Rivera and Prince Juan Carlos

'My reason makes me a monarchist; my ideology, a José Antonian–Falangist', Primo said in an interview to the conservative newspaper *Blanco y Negro* in February 1976.⁴⁴ Being a José Antonian and a monarchist at the same time was a contradiction. José Antonian Falangism was not compatible with the constitutional monarchy that had preceded Spain's Second Republic (1931–9). Considering what he wrote in *Blue Shirt* and his later clash with the CDJA, it is possible to assume that he considered transition to democracy the most José Antonian option of all. This section will analyse the relationship between Primo and the idea of a democratic monarchy and will explore how, from the mid-1960s, he worked to promote Don Juan Carlos and ensure his succession in order to be able to bring back democracy once Franco died.

In the same file of 'Personal texts' (*Escritos personales*) there is a long manuscript titled *Four Fundamental Points the Prince must consider* (*Cuatro Puntos Fundamentales que el Príncipe debe*

⁴⁰ *Camisa azul*, MPRU Arch. 12/Escritos personales, fol. 28, 2.

⁴¹ 'Discurso', 3 Dec. 1964, MPRU Arch. 12/Escritos personales, fol. 31, 2. (MPRU wrote this in capital letters: 'sería la SEGUNDA MUERTE').

⁴² Primo de Rivera y Urquijo, *No a las dos Españas*, 48.

⁴³ *Camisa azul*, 2.

⁴⁴ MPRU Arch. 19/17/Declaraciones prensa. 'Entrevista en *Blanco y Negro*', 21 Feb. 1976, 5.

conocer), which outlines the steps for Don Juan Carlos to follow in order to get Franco to designate him as his successor and to ensure that the Spanish people supported a monarchy.⁴⁵ Even though during his defence of the Political Reform Act in 1976, Primo assured the *procuradores* that he had never envisioned the regime as ‘a parenthesis’ but rather as a ‘real and important part of our History’,⁴⁶ the *Four Points* manuscript reveals that he believed that no matter what reforms the regime underwent, any attempt to extend Francoism after Franco would result in chaos. He recognised that the Francoist regime had been necessary, especially to ensure economic and social reconstruction after the civil war, but he knew that under that regime, Spaniards would never attain national reconciliation.⁴⁷

Unlike personalist regimes such as Franco’s, Primo believed a monarchy ensured the ‘fundamental notion of continuity of which nations require to establish a stable regime in permanent political equilibrium’.⁴⁸ It was the only possible formula to accomplish a transition to democracy. ‘The Monarchy must first of all tie itself to the people’, he wrote. ‘[The Franco regime] is a dictatorship, whether we like it or not. [The Monarchy] must never become a dictatorial regime which the majority of the Spanish people are opposed to’.⁴⁹ It is true that ‘the Spanish people’ was a concept Francoists used constantly to convey the sense of the regime having popular character.⁵⁰ Democratic expressions were also used as an attempt to make the regime more appealing to other European nations. However, the key of the *Four Points* resides in that it was, first of all, a private document Primo did not intend to circulate; and secondly, that it was written just at the time he had rejected Franco’s offer to become a councillor of the *Movimiento*, after the death of his uncle Miguel. Francoists did not refer to the regime as a ‘dictatorship’ and it is particularly interesting that Primo makes this distinction between the authoritarian Francoism and a hypothetical non-authoritarian monarchy. This document shows that at the same time Primo relinquished traditional Falangism – refusing to wear the blue shirt, dismissing Francoist Falangism as corrupt – he was thinking about a non-dictatorial form of government to replace Franco’s. He had the conviction that only through Juan Carlos’s monarchy would it be possible to bring forth a non-authoritarian government.

The problem was that Franco never overcame his fears about the succession of ‘liberal prince paving the way for communism’.⁵¹ This sentiment was shared by many extremist Francoists. Fearing Juan Carlos would be a puppet of his liberal father Don Juan, in exile since 1931, some flagged the idea of creating a military regency instead.⁵² Others preferred to name a more ideologically-aligned prince as successor – someone like the Carlist pretender Prince Carlos Hugo, or Juan Carlos’s own cousin, Don Alfonso (whose chance of succession increased in 1972 after marrying the dictator’s granddaughter). Franco himself encouraged the rivalry between the candidates in order to maximise their loyalty to the *Movimiento*.⁵³ The technocratic ministers finally convinced him to designate Juan Carlos as his successor in July 1969, but the prince still had little support.⁵⁴ *New York Times* correspondent in Spain Richard Eder reported that Juan Carlos was ‘an insurance policy that Franco has signed and hastily put back on the shelf’.⁵⁵

⁴⁵ We know *Cuatro puntos fundamentales* was written in late 1964 (like *Camisa azul*), because MPRU made reference to Juan Carlos’s age (twenty-six); given that Juan Carlos was born in Jan. 1938, this text must have been written in late 1964. MPRU (b. 1934) was thirty and had just been appointed Mayor of Jerez.

⁴⁶ *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Españolas*, no. 29. 16 Nov. 1976, 6.

⁴⁷ MPRU Arch. 05/sin nombre, fol. 71, 29 Feb. 1980.

⁴⁸ ‘*Cuatro puntos fundamentales*’, MPRU Arch. 12/Escritos personales, fol. 38, 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁰ Pere Ysas, *Disidencia y subversión: La lucha del régimen franquista por su supervivencia, 1960–1975* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2004), 29.

⁵¹ Quoted in Julio Gil Pecharromán, *Con permiso de la autoridad: La España de Franco (1939–1975)* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2008), 255.

⁵² Gil Pecharromán, *Con permiso de la autoridad*. See also Álvaro Soto Carmona, *¿Atado y bien atado? Institucionalización y crisis del Franquismo* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2005).

⁵³ Powell, *El piloto del cambio*, 46.

⁵⁴ Ismael Saz, ‘Mucho más que crisis políticas: El agotamiento de dos proyectos enfrentados’, *Ayer* 68, no. 4 (2007): 137–63.

⁵⁵ *New York Times*, 4 Feb. 1970, MPRU Arch. 20.

Because of his delicate position, it was crucial for Juan Carlos to convince the regime that he would not be less Francoist than either of the other two candidates and that he would clearly follow in the footsteps of the generalissimo. This is where Primo played a key role. He took advantage of his position as 'heir of José Antonio' to reassure the regime elite of Juan Carlos's Francoist credentials and win over political support for his succession. When, in 1976, Primo defended democratisation as the last act of loyalty to Franco and José Antonio, he would only be reiterating arguments he had first invoked to defend the Juan Carlist monarchy back in 1969.

After Juan Carlos's proclamation as Franco's successor, Primo wrote a letter to the prince in which he advised him that, as king, he should always rely on 'the popular support for the *Movimiento Nacional*' and 'tirelessly try to bring comfort to all the falangist men scattered all over our geography'.⁵⁶ It might appear that these references to Falangism contradict Primo's belief about a democratic monarchy but the reason for this choice of words was that the letter was not intended to remain private. Primo circulated it to people high in the Francoist echelons to convince them of the Francoist convictions of Juan Carlos. Among the people who received a copy of the letter were Antonio María de Oriol, a Carlist who at the time served as Minister of Justice (he was also Primo's father-in-law), and José Antonio Girón de Velasco, one of the most important traditional Falangist generals and an absolute Franco devotee. (Girón would later become the visible leader of the so-called 'bunker', the group of outright Francoists opposed to any reform of the regime.) The letter had clear messages for all orthodox Francoists: 'By confirming Your Highness as successor, the *procuradores* have said "Yes" to Franco, that genius of a man who so well has governed Spain for thirty years. . . . Nobody can doubt the great convenience of his choice'.⁵⁷ As noted by Gil Pecharrromán, transmitting this idea was crucial: once Franco proposed the monarchy as a system for Spain after his death, anyone calling himself a Francoist would have to support his decision.⁵⁸

Whereas Oriol's answer was encouraging (he told Primo that after listening to Juan Carlos's pro-Franco speech in the Cortes, many old Carlists now had 'the same faith in the Successor as you'),⁵⁹ Girón's was short of a veiled threat. He bitterly resented Juan Carlos, whose designation had been supported by the same technocrats who had ousted him from power in 1957.⁶⁰ It was not a coincidence that the Falangist newspaper *Diario SP*, under Girón's protection,⁶¹ showed no attachment to the Juan Carlist cause and even flirted with an old Falangist republican ideal.⁶² 'The Lion', as he was known in Falangist circles, was not going to make things easy for the prince, as his answer to Primo evidenced:

The people of Spain believe in reality and they believe in the supreme reality of *Caudillaje*, the institution of an exceptional man They feel the hand of the *Caudillo* on their shoulder. It is almost a physical sensation. It will not be easy to replace this belief, this faith . . . with another man and another institution.⁶³

Girón genuinely believed in the divine authority of the generalissimo, an authority he would never recognise any monarch to have. When Juan Carlos ascended the throne and thought of replacing the

⁵⁶ Primo de Rivera to Prince Juan Carlos, 1 Aug. 1969, MPRU Arch. 20.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Gil Pecharrromán, *La estirpe del camaleón*, 92.

⁵⁹ Oriol to Primo de Rivera, 24 Aug. 1969, MPRU Arch. 20.

⁶⁰ Saz, 'Mucho más que crisis políticas', 146–9.

⁶¹ José Luis Rodríguez Jiménez, *Reaccionarios y golpistas: La extrema derecha en España del tardofranquismo a la consolidación de la democracia (1967–1982)* (Madrid: Editorial CSIC, 1994), 132.

⁶² Cristina Barreiro Gordillo, 'La designación de Don Juan Carlos vista por los diarios Madrileños: Una perspectiva comparada', *Pasado y Memoria* 17 (2018): 492–4. For a detailed analysis of this Republican–Falangist ideal see Nicolás Sesma Landrin, 'El republicanismo en la cultura política falangista: De la falange fundacional al modelo de la V República Francesa', *Espacio Tiempo y Forma. Serie V, Historia Contemporánea* no. 18 (2006): 261–83.

⁶³ Girón to Primo de Rivera, 4 Dec. 1969, MPRU Arch. 20.

prime minister, Carlos Arias, as was his prerogative to do as head of state, Girón warned: ‘The King cannot act like Franco. Arias is no good at all, but he must stay’.⁶⁴ His answer evidenced that Juan Carlos was still perceived with scepticism by powerful people in the regime.

The prince’s entourage had to convince the Francoists that his reign would not put in jeopardy the essence of the regime, the so-called ‘spirit of 18 July’ (the day the Nationalists rose in arms against the Republic in 1936). In the following years, Primo’s letter served as a source of arguments to support this. Four days after Franco’s death, Primo was summoned to Zarzuela Palace, where he met with General Alfonso Armada, secretary general of the Royal Household, to discuss the prince’s speech for his proclamation ceremony before the Cortes. The first point taken at the meeting was the following: ‘Letter to the Prince, 69’.⁶⁵ The arguments used in 1969 to convince the elite of the prince’s Francoist credentials were reiterated in 1975 just as his reign began. Primo and Armada discussed how the proclamation speech had to ‘emphasise 18 July, Franco, institutions and the [regime’s] trade union’. The speech had to transmit one sole and clear ‘message of propaganda’: Juan Carlos’s would be ‘a fascist monarchy’.⁶⁶ Even though Primo in his memoirs reiterated that his desire was for Juan Carlos to build a monarchy for all Spaniards, at that delicate moment it was imperative that Juan Carlism was identified with Francoism. In order for the monarchy to eventually become democratic, it first had to be Francoist. Primo would carry the strategy forward in the following years and with greater success than in 1969. In 1971, he entered the Council of the Realm, the highest institution in the regime, from where he acted as an agent of Juan Carlos, and contributed to the dismantling of the dictatorship from within.

Primo de Rivera in the Council of the Realm (1971–7)

Primo’s political influence is directly proportional to the importance of the Council of the Realm within Francoist Spain. The Council was the highest institution of the dictatorship. According to Karl Lowenstein, who wrote on the juridical structures of the regime, the Council was a hybrid body designed to ‘control’ the head of state.⁶⁷ The most significant executive function of the Council was shortlisting the names of three candidates (a *terna* – ‘list of three’ in Spanish) for the highest offices of the state, including president of the Cortes (and the Council) and prime minister. The head of state would then choose one of the names from the *terna* proposed by the sixteen councillors. Whilst Franco lived, these sessions were merely ceremonial and the actual power of the council non-existent. The council would never challenge Franco’s preferred candidate for the premiership. This was seen, for example, when Admiral Carrero Blanco became prime minister in June 1973. Primo noted during the session: ‘It’s very difficult to imagine either of the two other names as P[resident of the] Government’.⁶⁸ Carrero’s name was not even voted; he was automatically confirmed. A very different panorama unfolded after Franco’s death.

The lack of sources has again obscured Primo’s importance in managing the designation of Suárez as prime minister in 1976, and historians have come to almost ignore his role.⁶⁹ A significant case is Álvaro de Diego’s article on the Suárez episode: his argument, based on *No a la Dos Españas*, merely stated that Primo had voted for Suárez and persuaded other councillors to do so as well, because he had been told to do so by Fernández-Miranda, president of the council.⁷⁰ This is exactly what Primo

⁶⁴ Quoted in Pilar and Alfonso Fernández-Miranda, *Lo que el Rey me ha pedido: Torcuato Fernández-Miranda y la reforma política* (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1996), 112.

⁶⁵ ‘A. Armada’, 21 Nov. 1975, MPRU Arch.17/11/Consejo del Reino, fol. 3, 1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 3, 3–4.

⁶⁷ Karl Lowenstein, *Teoría de la Constitución* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1964): 62.

⁶⁸ Sesión del Consejo, 4 June 1973, MPRU Archive 17/11/Consejo del Reino, fol. 2. (MPRU’s underlining).

⁶⁹ The story of the Suárez *terna* has been told over and over again by historians, but the actual intricacies of the process remain largely unknown due to the limited source material on those sessions of the Council of the Realm. Primo’s role is largely ignored. See, for example Charles Powell, *España en democracia* (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 2001); Joaquín Bardavío, *Crónica de la transición, 1973–1978* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2009).

⁷⁰ Álvaro de Diego González, ‘El nombramiento del presidente del gobierno de la reforma política: Un episodio clave de la transición democrática’, *Aportes. Revista de Historia Contemporánea* 28, no. 82 (2013): 9.

said in the following years about it. In interviews he gave – the most significant one to Prego in 1997 – and in his memoirs, Primo gave the impression that there were no details to be known. ‘Fernández-Miranda [president of the council] told me to speak to these councillors. I told them about the importance of Suárez being in the *terna*. That was it. Period’, he told Prego.⁷¹ He also claimed that he had no idea Suárez would become prime minister. Apparently Fernández-Miranda told him it was important, a mere gesture to the *Movimiento* (Suárez had been minister-secretary general), to include him in the *terna* but ‘in no way is he in for the premiership’.⁷² A secretive and mis-leading person, it would almost appear as if Primo had accidentally stumbled into that council session of July 1976. Nevertheless, the papers found in his archive provide evidence that belies his hermetic character: they reveal that along with Fernández-Miranda, Primo had planned to disguise a pro-democratic candidate in Francoist robes and smuggle him into the prime-ministerial *terna*. Taking into consideration Primo’s actions since 1965, this was not mere opportunism but rather the result of a long-thought-out political conviction.

To dismantle the regime from the inside, Juan Carlos needed to control the premiership and the presidency of the Cortes, both of which were in the hands of outright Franco devotees Carlos Arias and Alejandro Rodríguez de Valcárcel. Juan Carlos was able to replace the latter with Fernández-Miranda, his former tutor, but the prime minister was harder to remove. The influence of ‘the bunker’ – the group of hard-line Francoist generals – kept Arias in power.⁷³ And even if Arias voluntarily resigned, nothing guaranteed Juan Carlos that the next *terna* would include a candidate fit for democratisation. Primo proved to be decisive in this aspect.

On 19 November 1975, hours before Franco died, he was summoned to the palace to meet the prince. Primo agreed to ‘offer myself as councillor of the Realm . . . to be used in any way, as part of any strategy’.⁷⁴ In effect, he became Juan Carlos’s mole inside the council. He first managed to get Fernández-Miranda in the *terna* for president of the Cortes and the council; even though ‘at that moment I did not like [him]’, he knew that his alliance with him could ‘be of great service to Spain and, of course, to the King’.⁷⁵ Together, they orchestrated Arias’s replacement with Suárez.

Primo met Fernández-Miranda on the afternoon of 4 December 1975. Fernández-Miranda wanted Arias out as soon as possible, but there was no clear name to replace him. The obvious reformist candidates – José María de Areilza, Manuel Fraga and Pío Cabanillas – which would definitely serve for the purpose of democratisation, were too liberal to obtain the support of the Francoist elite. Primo bluntly told Fernández-Miranda: ‘With the present Council, I cannot get anyone like Areilza, Fraga, Cabanillas in [the *terna*]. We need new men of unquestionable loyalty to the King, but also men who are in line with the Fundamental Principles [of the *Movimiento*]’.⁷⁶ Including reformists in the *terna* and moving too soon against Arias, Primo knew, would definitely spook the ‘bunker’ Francoists, whose support was necessary at this stage to protect Juan Carlos’s reign. He finally convinced Fernández-Miranda to force Arias to reshuffle his cabinet – but ‘not too severely, in case he resigns’ (Primo feared that forcing too many new ministers on Arias would be as dangerous as removing him).⁷⁷ Suárez was appointed minister-secretary general of the *Movimiento*. ‘Bunker’ Francoists should be given no reason to suspect what was actually happening. This had also been Primo’s *modus operandi* with the *terna* for the presidency of the council. He had insisted to Juan Carlos that even though Fernández-Miranda would be the designee, the previous president, Valcárcel, ‘had

⁷¹ Prego, *Así se hizo la transición*, 491.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ For an account of Arias’ frustrated spirit of reform see Juan Andrés García Martín, ‘El fracaso de la apertura de 1974 y sus protagonistas’, *La Albolafia: Revista de Humanidades y Cultura* no. 4 (2015): 175–86; Carr and Fusi, *Spain: Dictatorship to Democracy*, 195–202.

⁷⁴ ‘Entrevista con S.A.R.’, 19 Nov. 1975, MPRU Arch.17/11/Consejo del Reino, fol. 1, 1.

⁷⁵ ‘Entrevista con Fdez. Miranda’, 4 Dec. 1975, MPRU Arch.17/11/Consejo del Reino, fol. 4, 1.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 4, 4. Original expression in Spanish: ‘*Con este Consejo del Reino, no los saco.*’

⁷⁷ ‘Entrevista con Fdez. Miranda’, 4 Dec. 1975, MPRU Arch. 17/11/Consejo del Reino, fol. 4, 3. He also proposed himself as Minister of Agriculture.

to go in the *terna*: he had the support of many Francoist councillors and if he was not even included, they could turn against Juan Carlos.⁷⁸ The same happened with the premiership *terna*: Suárez, who was linked to the *Movimiento*, was a perfect candidate not to alienate the regime. The conversation between Fernández-Miranda and Primo also illustrates the latter's degree of influence in the council. The fact that he stated that he was the one who got people in the *terna* reveals that he knew he was a key element in the architecture of the transition.

Nevertheless, the council still remained a prominent source of Francoist resentment for the monarchy. Wining over its loyalty was no easy task given that the majority of the councillors were closer to Arias (or rather to what Arias represented) than to Juan Carlos.⁷⁹ In order to win them over, the king called a meeting of the Council of the Realm at Zarzuela Palace on 3 March 1976.⁸⁰ It was the first time the head of state chaired a session – Franco had never done so. It was Primo who recommended to the king to take this step in order to convey the sense that he was willing to share power with the councillors. He also assured his colleagues that this was the king's intention: he told them that by accepting the king's proposal they 'would demonstrate [the council's] importance and significance in the political game' and that its members 'were not sheep' following the commands of the government.⁸¹ Primo wanted the Francoists to believe that Juan Carlos was asking for their support to preserve Franco's legacy. That was exactly what the king told the councillors during the session. He also took the opportunity, however, to remind the councillors who they owed allegiance to: Juan Carlos, as head of state, had the power to call a referendum if the council vetoed a law he deemed important for the nation (he was surely thinking about the Political Reform Act, already in the mind of Fernández-Miranda).⁸² According to Primo's notes, after finishing his speech the king closed the meeting by saying: 'I am conscious that I could not have had a better teacher than Franco. [His example] makes it possible for me to bear the weight of this difficult time'.⁸³ Again he was trying to show the 'bunker' that his reign represented the ideological continuation of Franco's regime. This was particularly important at this point since, as Primo noted down, some of the more orthodox Francoists did not hesitate to show their resentment of Juan Carlos in that session.⁸⁴ This meeting of the council served to test the waters before Juan Carlos decided to move against Arias and replace him as prime minister.

The famous session in which Suárez made it onto the *terna* took place on 2 July 1976, a day after Arias had hastily handed in his resignation. The debate began with a discussion of the desirable qualities for a prime minister. This way Primo and Fernández-Miranda were able to assess the predisposition of the different councillors towards one name or another. In his papers, Primo noted down the name of each councillor and what they looked for in a prime ministerial candidate. It came as no surprise that Girón defended the 'continuity of the regime of 18 July' or that Oriol, a moderate reformist, favoured someone who would 'reform but without liquidating the state'.⁸⁵ (Figure 1)

Primo's proposals were most certainly not shared with the rest of the council, but they do indicate what type of prime minister he had in mind: a 'non-partisan man, accepted by all ideological families', belonging to the generation who had not fought in the civil war and who was accepted by national and international elites. More importantly, Primo noted down, the candidate should be a man with appeal,

⁷⁸ 'Entrevista con S.A.R.', 19 Nov. 1975, MPRU Arch.17/11/Consejo del Reino, fol. 1, 2.

⁷⁹ Fernández-Miranda, *Lo que El Rey me ha pedido*, 210.

⁸⁰ Despite the importance of this meeting, few historians have considered it in their accounts. Carr and Fusi, *Spain: Dictatorship to Democracy*; Prego, *Así se hizo la transición*; Juliá, *Transición*; Ruiz Romero, *Del Franquismo a la reforma*. It is surprising that even if this was an important move against the bunker, historian José Luis Rodríguez Jiménez ignored it in his study of the far right in this period. Powell mentioned this meeting in his biography of Juan Carlos, echoing Pilar Fernández-Miranda. See: Rodríguez Jiménez, *Reaccionarios y golpistas*; Charles Powell, *Juan Carlos of Spain: A Self-Made Monarch* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).

⁸¹ 'Prórroga legislativa', 27 Jan. 1976, MPRU Archive 17/ Consejo del Reino, fol. s/n, 5.

⁸² 'Discurso de S.M. a los miembros del Consejo del Reino', MPRU Archive 17/11/Consejo del Reino, fol. nn.

⁸³ 'Reunión Zarzuela', 2 Feb. 1976 [sic. MPRU's error: the meeting was on 3 Mar. 1976], MPRU Archive 17/11/Consejo del Reino, fol. s/n, 6.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. s/n, 5–6.

⁸⁵ 'Notes on the Council session', 2 July 1976, MPRU Archive 17/11/Consejo del Reino, fol. s/n, 1.

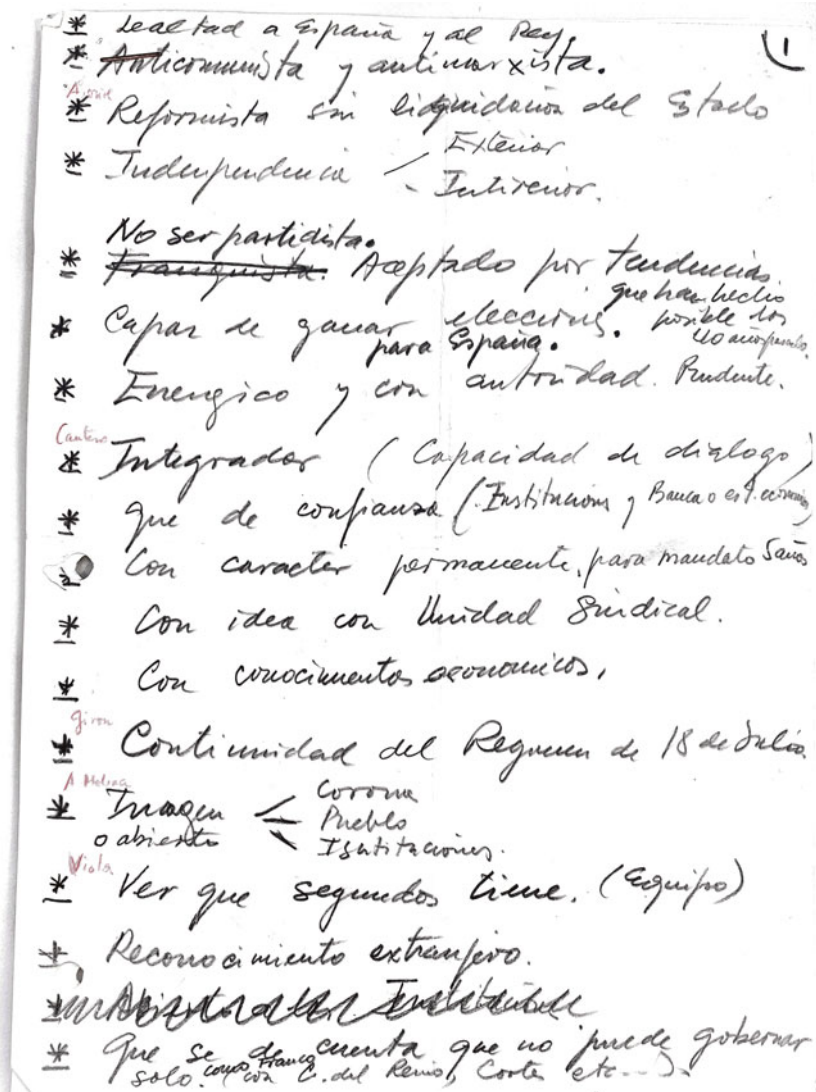


Figure 1. Notes taken by MPRU during the Council's debate on the desired qualities of a future premier, 2 July 1976 (MPRU Arch, 17/11/Consejo del Reino).

with 'energy but prudence' and 'capable of winning elections'.⁸⁶ The legislative term of the Cortes had been extended to June 1977: the prime minister leading the transition had to be the same prime minister that ran in the first democratic elections.⁸⁷

The product of this discussion was a list of thirty-two names. Twenty-three names were quickly crossed out, including Fraga's and Areilza's (both by eleven votes against five).⁸⁸ Everybody believed Areilza would make it to the premiership, but as can be seen from Primo's papers, his name had long been vetoed.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Fernández-Miranda, *Lo que El Rey me ha pedido*, 252.

⁸⁸ 'Notes on the Council session', MPRU Arch.17/11/Consejo del Reino, fol. n, 22 July 1976.

⁸⁹ Even before the meeting with Miranda: the veto on Areilza it had been one of the first things Primo had discussed with Armada back in Nov. 1975, just hours after Franco's death. 'A. Armada', 21 Nov. 1975, MPRU Arch.17/11/Consejo del Reino, fol. 3. 2.

Primo himself was not fond of Areilza.⁹⁰ Feeling betrayed by the king, both Areilza and Fraga would refuse to serve in Suárez's cabinet when Juan Carlos asked them to.⁹¹

Suárez somehow made it to the final list, as a candidate of the *Movimiento*. He fit the desired profile perfectly: a man of the regime but loyal to the king. Primo then used his connections with the councillors belonging to the Oriol family (his own kin) to obtain twelve votes for Suárez⁹² (Figures 2 and 3). By playing the role of heir of José Antonio and presenting Suárez as a Francoist, Primo managed to put one of Juan Carlos's men up for the premiership.

The final proof that Primo knew that Suárez was the man for prime minister was that he changed his vote at the last minute to prevent one of the candidates, Federico Silva, from getting the votes of all sixteen councillors. If Silva had received sixteen votes, the king would possibly feel forced to comply with the council's unanimous decision and appoint him. For Suárez to have a chance, it was important that Silva did not get all of the votes.⁹³

The episode of the Suárez *terna* shows in a nutshell Primo's mission during the transition: to deceive Francoist hierarchs and convince them that the slow-motioned destruction of the regime – which included the designation of someone like Suárez as prime minister – was the most Francoist thing that could be done. That spirit, which is the same spirit that led him to break with the Falange in 1964–8 and support Juan Carlos's designation as heir in 1969, articulated his speech in defence of the Political Reform Act in November 1976.

The heir of José Antonio defending democracy is an image that has puzzled historians, but taking into account Primo's private papers, this was the culmination of a process that had begun back in 1965. Primo assured the *procuradores* that Franco's had been 'an authority impossible to imitate' and that no one had the legitimacy to decide how to replace him but the Spanish people via elections.⁹⁴ Democracy was not the end but the means, he assured them. But of course this is not what he actually thought. His speech combined all of his political positionings about personalism and his particular version of José Antonism. Curiously enough, his opponents in 1976 confronted him with the same accusations he had been fencing off his entire life: 'It has always been difficult for those of us who served Franco from the radiant positionings of José Antonio, to coexist with those who never believed in the true philosophy of the regime', said *procurador* José Fernández de la Vega, who opposed the Reform.⁹⁵ It was the same logic Hillers had used back in his day. And Primo's struggle was against the same dogmatists who had not considered that his interpretation of José Antonism was good enough for José Antonio's heir.

Democracy and the Transition 'from above'

The Political Reform Act put an end to the Council of the Realm and, with it, to Primo's strategic importance in the transition. However, this was not the only reason why Primo exited the main political scene after November 1976. One of the possible explanations is his fallout with Suárez after the communist terrorist group GRAPO kidnapped his father-in-law Oriol, at that time president of the Council of State. Primo resented the way the government handled Oriol's kidnapping and found it hard to accept the legalisation of the Communist Party just a few weeks after Oriol had been freed. He believed this had been an 'act of cowardice'.⁹⁶ After that, he began to resent the members of

⁹⁰ Primo still resented that, whilst serving as private secretary to Don Juan, Areilza had issued a strongly-worded statement against the 1969 Law of Succession, endangering (Primo believed) Juan Carlos's designation. Areilza had claimed that the monarchy proposed by Franco 'only serves those who seek to perpetuate themselves in power using the same methods as always, repeating the same mistakes and using the same language that does not appeal to the people'. 'Nota de José María de Areilza', 19 July 1969, MPRU Archive 20/Ppe. de España.

⁹¹ Prego, *Así se hizo la transición*, 502.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 491–3.

⁹³ Silva never knew Primo had not voted for him and would actually thank him 'for giving me your trust and your vote for prime minister'. Federico Silva to Primo de Rivera, 6 July 1976, MPRU Arch. 17/11/Consejo del Reino.

⁹⁴ *DSCE*, no. 29, 16 Nov. 1976, 6.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹⁶ MPRU Arch. 05/sin nombre, fol. 5, 4 Feb. 1978; MPRU Arch. 05/sin nombre, fol. 6, 8 Feb. 1978.

- E. M.^o de ORIOL
 1 FDEZ de la MORA
 3 ALEJANDRO R. VARGARCEL
 4 G. HERNANDEZ
 5 SOLIS
 6 LOPEZ RODO
 7 SILVA
 8 ~~FRAGA~~ FRAGA. VOT. 11/5
 9 AREILZA VOT 11/5
 10 LOPEZ BRAVO.
 11 ADOLFO SUAREZ
 12 LUCINIO de la FUENTE VOT. 12/4.
 13 CABELLO ~~VARGARCEL~~
 14 A. OSORIO VOT 13/3
 15 JESUS ROMEO
 16 CASTIELLA VOT. 14/2
 17 AZCARATE J. M.^o
 18 VIRGILIO OÑATE
 19 ANTONIO A. HIRANDA.
 20 GENERAL SANTIAGO
 21 GENERAL GALERA
 22 EMILIO LAMO
 23 PEREZ BRICIO
 24 L. CALVO SOTELO
 25 J. RUIZ GIMENEZ
 26 J. SANCHEZ CORTES
 27 R. FDEZ CUESTA.
 28 A. FDEZ SERDO
 29 F. SUAREZ VOT 12/4.
 30 BARRERA.
 31 CRUZ MINEZ ESTERUECAS VOT. 10/6.

Figure 2. Initial list of thirty-two candidates for the terna. Those highlighted in green were the first round discards. (MPRU Arch. 17/11/Consejo del Reino).

the Suárez cabinet, even his former friend Rodolfo Martín Villa, who as Minister of the Interior had been in charge of handling Oriol's kidnapping. 'Martín Villa can fool us no more', he told Fernández-Miranda.⁹⁷ Apart from the Oriol issue, it is possible that Primo's influence decreased

⁹⁷ 'Entrevista con Fdez. Miranda (ii)', MPRU Arch. 05/sin nombre, fol. 28, 28 Mar. 1978. Martín Villa had been Councillor of the Realm in 1973–4, during which he developed a close friendship with Primo (Martín Villa a Primo de Rivera, 18

<p>3 Antonio 4 P. Molino 5 Trujos 6 Araluce 7 Vallerjén 8 Canters 9 Toruato 10 Lora. 11 Sala. 12 V. Silva. 13 Vila. 14 Rector. 15 Mata. 16 Yo.</p>	<p>Silva - A Miranda - Gouardo Silva - A Miranda - Gouardo.</p> <p>} Silva - L. Bravo. A. Suarez.</p> <p>Silva - A. Suarez - L. Bravo Silva - A. Suarez - L. Bravo, Silva - A. Suarez - L. Bravo Silva - Gouardo - L. Bravo. Silva - Lopez Bravo - A. Suarez. Silva - R. Venced - A. Miranda. L. Bravo - Adolfo - A. Miranda.</p>
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X Silva	15
L. Bravo	13
X Adolfo	12
X A. Miranda	4
X Gouardo	3
R. Venced	1

Figure 3. Final vote on the terna, including Suárez. MPRU was councillor number 16 listed as 'yo' ('me'). The first two names are Girón's and Dioniso Martín Sanz's, another member of the bunker. (MPRU Arch. 17/11/Consejo del Reino).

because after the Reform and the first democratic elections in June 1977, he was no longer as important an asset as he had been during the years of the dictatorship.

Even so, Primo's democratic principles remained unshaken and were actually more advanced than that of other former members of the regime. For example, he defended the legalisation of the Communist Party (even though he disagreed with the moment chosen to do so), something which people like Fraga never supported. Primo believed that the Community Party had to be legal in order to achieve 'a democratic and pluralistic society'.⁹⁸ He also believed decentralisation was the solution to Spain's ancient problem of peripheric nationalism, which had become a 'powder keg' in the 1970s.⁹⁹

Oct. 1973. MPRU Arch. 17/11/Consejo del Reino). However, it is possible that Martín Villa's handling of the Oriol issue strained their relationship.

⁹⁸ MPRU Arch. 05/sin nombre, fol. 3, 4 Feb. 1978.

⁹⁹ Ibid., fol. 26, 28, Mar. 1978; *ibid.*, fol. 49, 13 July 1978.

The ‘only way of monarchising the regions’ was reaching an agreement with the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) and the Catalan conservative nationalists, ‘accepting some of their proposals as long as they never challenge Spanish national unity’.¹⁰⁰

Primo’s firm defence of the democratic system can also be seen in the fact that in times of trouble he never supported authoritarian reactions, unlike some politicians who had also orchestrated the transition. An interesting case showing this is his attitude in the plot against Suárez in March 1978. The leader of this plot was Silva, who planned to get the king to dismiss Suárez and ask Fernández-Miranda or himself to form a concentration government. Silva wanted Primo to convince the king of this. But Primo refused; it would have meant the implosion of the transition: ‘They better not try to call it a national government or a concentration government’, he wrote. ‘It’s a coup. And it cannot be allowed’.¹⁰¹ Primo had reason to dislike Suárez. He resented the influence he had over the king and feared he was manipulating him: ‘[Suárez] is weakening the King’, he wrote.¹⁰² ‘He is with the King all day long . . . he has him asleep, hypnotised I would dare say. This way he will never be the king of all Spaniards, perhaps not even the king of one of them’.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, he was not going to scheme against the democratically-elected government. He protected the democratic system, not Suárez. Not only did he not pressure the king as Silva wanted, but he also warned Juan Carlos about the conspiracy. ‘This will eventually become a rebellion against Your Majesty’, he warned him over a telephone call he transcribed.¹⁰⁴ Primo knew that when a king forcefully imposed a prime minister he was gambling on the crown: that had been the case with Alfonso XIII who had accepted Primo’s grandfather’s coup in 1923, sealing his own fate.

The case of Primo de Rivera presented in this article shows it is still important to consider the role of the politician in Spain’s transition. Lately, new historiographical approaches have tended to explore the context in which democratisation took place – the study of which is well served by the depersonalisation of the story and use of ‘history from below’ methodologies. Certainly, the *forces profondes* operating at the core of society were crucial to manage this huge political transformation; public mobilisation and the role of the opposition (communists, liberals, socialists, even a sector of the Catholic Church) were as important to the transition as the role of the reformist elite. By no means does this article argue that one was more important than the other, since it is quite probable that without the elite there would have never been a reform, just as it is certain that without popular mobilisation and systemic factors there would have never been a need for transition.

However, rediscovering of the context of the transition provides new details about the process by which Francoism was brought to an institutional and political end. In order to understand the details of this, it is necessary to focus on the figure of the politician. This is what this article has tried to do, bringing to the debate the actions of a new politician whose role has not been widely considered. The case study presented here widens our understanding of the transition and of the group of democratic reformists within the regime. This generation of men who came to power in the early 1970s and belonged to the generation who had not fought in the civil war were the keystone of the ‘transition from above’. Scholars have focused on the most famous and popular figures (those who later served in government after 1975), but many important figures with a crucial role in the process have remained in the dark. Primo is just an example, albeit a fascinating one given his past and context, and yet he played a crucial role in the democratisation process.

This paper has shown that the reasons for his support of democracy were much more ideological than opportunistic. The few historians studying Primo through his memoirs have not been able to escape the notion of opportunism and possibilism to explain his political behaviour. Until public access was given to his archive, there were few sources to study Primo, other than *No a las dos*

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., fol. 51, 19 July 1978.

¹⁰¹ ‘Entrevista con Fdez. Miranda’, MPRU Arch. 05/sin nombre, fol. 28, 28 Mar. 1978. (MPRU’s underlining).

¹⁰² MPRU Arch. 05/sin nombre, fol. 39, 28 Abr. 1978.

¹⁰³ Ibid., fol. 3, 4 Feb. 1978.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Conversación con el Rey’, MPRU Arch. 05/sin nombre, fol. 30, 29 Mar. 1978.

Españas; thus it could be claimed that historians' conclusions to date have been reached on the basis of a limited and misleading primary source and prejudiced (yet logical) assumption – what, other than opportunism, could lead a Primo de Rivera to defend democracy? This article has shown quite the opposite. Primo de Rivera, though a central part of the regime's ideological-cultural structure, supported democracy not only for pragmatic reasons (Spain's socioeconomic crisis and international isolation, Franco's poor health, his friendship with Don Juan Carlos) but also because of his ideology: he had always believed that democracy was necessary for Spain to heal the wounds of the civil war, overcome the dictatorship, and further its political, social and economic progress.

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