

# After Decades Of Repression, Democracy Is Still the Wish

By Flora Lewis

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MADRID—Among a group of 12 Madrid University students gathered to talk politics, six declared themselves Communists, five Socialists and one Catholic-Socialist. Only one opposed “bourgeois democracy” and said that civic freedoms would have to be limited come the revolution “the bourgeoisie couldn't get power back.”

The others argued that the one wasn't really a democrat. He was furious at what he considered the most insulting comment they could have made.

In Spain, most people speak of a preference for democracy, although there is a wide spread of views about what that means in practical terms and how to achieve it.

The supporters of dictatorship still exist. They make speeches, nut extreme-right newspapers extolling the Falange, and some are very influential. But hardly anyone, even ultra-conservative businessmen, wants to be identified with them or fails to insist on democratic reforms of some kind.

In Portugal, which emerged from 48 years of dictatorship 18 months ago, the Communists and the extreme left denounce “Western-style democracy” and the Communist leader, Alvaro Cunhal, brushed aside election results with a contemptuous “politics is not arithmetic.”

They are in an evident minority, and, despite demonstrations such as last week's construction strike, their popular support is ebbing. The Communists have lost their near control of the Government. An important party member in Lisbon said that if elections were held now, the Communist Party would probably get only half of the 12 percent of the votes they scored at the polls last April, when they still, benefited from the aura of being underground martyrs who had fought the dictatorship.

The antidemocratic right is discredited but its small and still ineffective resurgence is due primarily to the fears which the antidemocratic left has provoked. Most of the people make clear that they want a democratic system with civil liberties and free elections.

It isn't easy for people in either Spain or Portugal to say what they mean by

democracy, but although it has been unknown for two generations, it is the overwhelming demand.

So people are stunned when told that in the view of an American intellectual, democracy is a system “which simply has no relevance to the future.”

### Mr. Moynihan's Pessimism

They hadn't heard the words of Daniel Moynihan. Ambassador to the United Nations, who wrote in the bicentennial issue of the quarterly “Public Interest” that “liberal democracy on the American model increasingly tends to the condition of monarchy in the 19th century a holdover form of government, one which persists in isolated or peculiar places here and there, and may even serve well enough for special circumstances, but which simply has no relevance to the future. It is where the world was, not where it is going.”

A Spanish editor, who is active in politics, said: “It isn't easy to build a democracy. There are only a score or more countries in the world which have managed to achieve it. I know there will be a lot of difficulties, but our society has matured now and that is what we want.”

The idea of what democracy means and how to go about establishing it has undergone another evolution, at least in

Europe, or rather, it has reverted to an older interpretation. The notion during the period of decolonization that somehow the simple proclamation of democracy and a reasonable

amount of good will could implant the system and make it grow has collapsed, as Mr. Moynihan observed. Education, a decent standard of living, a degree of social cohesion, are now seen by Europeans as prerequisites for liberal democracy.

The Spanish Communist Party leader, Santiago Carrillo, a lifelong Communist although one who has had his differences with Moscow, said from his exile in Paris: “Maybe the United States where people have democracy, they don't prize it as in countries that don't have it. You only feel the real value of a thing when you lose it.”

When people are pressed to define what they mean by democracy, essential themes that emerge are the right to choose governments and to replace them when they displease, and the right to be unmolested in the minority which means both civil liberties and the rule of law.

Even most authoritarian leaders, especially those on the left, give lip-service to democracy. That is because they feel the magnetism that the democratic promise still radiates, even if they haven't the slightest intention of delivering.

Western European politicians tend to be startled by or disdainful of Mr. Moynihan's argument, particularly with the idea that developing nations may have some lessons to give on the value and appeal of democracy.

A leading French Socialist intellectual pointed out that the former colonies have had no experience with democracy. The fact that they proclaimed their intention of practising it, and have all failed, shows much more about the crushing, practical impact of underdevelopment on political evolution than it shows about democracy's future, he said.

What the lessons of modern Europe—both in countries practised in democracy and those only yearning for it—seem to indicate is that the fading system is liberal capitalism. That has been changing for a long time, especially since World War II.

“If Mr. Moynihan is confusing liberal capitalism with liberal democracy,” said one commentator, “he is the 19th century relic surviving in a peculiar place.”

Part of the difficulty arises from semantics. In the European political glossary, “liberal” means approximately what “laissez-faire” means to the English-speaking world. The transposition of language is no accident; each society borrowed the words for the concept it thought the other was advocating.

Other difficulties are partly material and social—living standards and services—and partly a matter of attitudes, cultural habits, and atmosphere.

Even advanced countries such as France can get impatient with the delays and apparent sloppiness of democracy in times of intense pressure, and turn to rely on placing tough decisions in the hands of an autocratic “savior.” That,

at least, is what non-Gaullists and probably many Gaullists believe brought the late Gen. Charles de Gaulle back to power by a coup d'état in 1958.

The American image in Europe, as in the rest of the world, has been tarnished as the United States emerged from a frontier society into a self-contained continent and then into a global superpower. But the “American model,” in strictly political terms of the philosophy, form and functioning of government, does not seem from abroad to have weathered nearly so badly as Mr. Moynihan suggests.

Antonio Garcia Trevijano Forte, a prominent Madrid lawyer who is president of the “Democratic Junta,” an opposition group which the Communists dominate, has been studying the United States Constitution. He believes that the presidential system and the separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers might better guarantee democracy for his country, as it moves to a new political organization, than the traditional European parliamentary system.

Not everybody agrees on that specific point—but it is hard to find some one outside of the extreme fringes, who is prepared to relegate the vision of democracy to the past. On the contrary, it is the present that people here want to relegate so that they can move on to a future of democracy.

*Flora Lewis, the Paris bureau chief of The New York Times, recently has been reporting in Spain and Portugal.*