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Article abstract

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Labor and Politics in Spain Today

Benjamin Martin

The trade unions elections of 1977 in Spain conferred a formal end of four decades of labour authoritarianism and marked the second major electoral process that has been established for the re-establishment of democratic institutions. According to the author, the outcome has important implications for the emerging national political configuration, the restructuring of the labour-management relationship, and the political strategies of the major political parties.

The trade union elections in Spain merit a good deal more attention than they have received for they represent an indispensable prerequisite for a restructuring of the country's industrial relations system and their outcome has had a sizeable impact on the general course of social, economic, and political developments. In the highly charged atmosphere of Spanish national affairs that currently prevails an event of this magnitude becomes transformed into a social and political battleground.

The elections conferred a formal end on four decades of Franco-style labor authoritarianism and herald the installation of a modern industrial relations system more in keeping with that of a Western European democratic society. The plant level voting marked the second major popular consultation (the first was the June, 1977 parliamentary elections) to have taken place since the end of Francoism and represents a major step in the democratic transition process. The outcome has important implications for the emerging national political configuration, the restructuring of the labor-management relationship, and the political strategies of the major political parties.

A government decree of December 6th ordered the holding of the long-awaited elections for the purpose of selecting worker bargaining

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representatives in public and private enterprises employing a minimum of six employees. Those with complements of 50 or more were also entitled to elect plant employee committees. They afforded workers an opportunity to replace the plant representation committees of the Franco era (Jurados de Empresas) with new ones based on their newly won right to freely vote for trade union representatives of their own choosing. Voting commenced January 15th and was to have concluded by mid-March but actually continued until May. Of the approximate six million workers located in some 186,000 enterprises that were eligible to participate in the voting, roughly three million have thus far done so. The level of worker participation is indeed significant since the holding of elections was not obligatory for employers many of whom after four decades of labor authoritarianism, continue to harbor strongly anti-union attitudes, attitudes that were stimulated by the Government's depreciation of the election process.¹

The state of development in Spain today — the nascent quality of many institutions and political movements — results in an atmosphere where significant social or economic issues, to an extent greater than what is usually encountered elsewhere, are inexorably drawn into the vortex of political rivalries. The arrangements for the holding of the plant elections were no exception. Thus, what ostensibly appeared as a universally accepted process in the reform of the labor relations structure became quickly transformed into a *cause célèbre* between the Socialists and the Government on the one hand, the Communists and Socialists on the other.

The setting of the January date was preceded by months of uncertainty and confusion caused by Government indecision in arriving at a firm date for the holding of the plant elections. During the Fall of 1977, November 15th had been set as the original voting date for the commencement of the voting process but various intervening factors led to still another delay.

An acrimonious controversy arose over the setting of the election rules. The Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) and its trade union ally, the

¹ Most European countries require the selection of employee representatives in all enterprises with a specified minimum number of employees. In Spain, however, the current elections were only required in those enterprises where employers and employees have agreed to their holding. In the discussions underway in the Cortes labor affairs commission concerning the enactment of a new collective bargaining statute, a consensus seems to be developing to extend representational rights to all appropriate enterprises within 90 days following enactment of the new statute.

General Union of Workers (UGT) accused the Government of openly discriminating in favor of the Communist-controlled Workers Commissions Trade Union Confederation (CC.OO.) for having decided that the elections were to be conducted on an «open list» (*listas abiertas*) basis whereby candidates appear on the ballots solely as individuals without any reference to their organizational affiliation. The system of «closed lists» (*listas cerradas*) advocated by the UGT required the organizational identity of all candidates to appear on the ballots. The Communist leadership of the Workers Commissions Confederation favored the open list method since it permitted many of their supporters to conceal their trade union and political identities. This was a matter of some importance since many workers, when presented with an alternative to choose between a pro-Communist and a pro-Socialist candidate, would tend to vote for the non-Communist choice. Furthermore, the open list method was more in line with the concept of labor unity (*assemblerismo*) postulated by the CC.OO. leadership.

The two approaches are also rooted in contrasting concepts of trade union action. During the Franco era, the Workers Commissions had evolved a distinctive form of organization and action. It served as a semi-clandestine opposition force within the official trade union structure in the form of groups of activists supported by workers assemblies at the plant level that were organized for specific purposes. Following the advent of the post-Franco period and legality the CC.OO. leadership sought to utilize the organization's pluralist character containing diverse tendencies as a basis for the establishment of a unitary trade union body. But this effort was unsuccessful because Spanish trade unionism operates in a highly politicalized environment and the chances are therefore exceedingly poor for such a unified organization to somehow insulate itself from its effects. Furthermore, the PCE exercises overwhelming control over the CC.OO. to which must be added the superior party resources and cadres at its disposal, persuaded the UGT and others that this proposal was merely a means for the Communists to take control of the entire labor movement.

The UGT outlook represents the continuity of a historical tradition in which it has long served as the semi-independent trade union wing of the Spanish socialist movement, in fact the UGT itself a «socialist» trade union. The relationship is generally comparable to that which prevails in other Western European countries between trade unions and socialist parties. But as the Communist Party has increasingly abandoned various tenets of Marxism-Leninism and moved closer to the Socialist outlook, this has had the effect of often blurring existing differences in the trade union field as well. Thus, for example,

there as yet appears to be little substantive difference between the two labor organizations with respect to trade union action and collective bargaining policies.

The differing electoral strategies of the UGT and CC.OO. arose from considerations dictated by the results of the June, 1977 parliamentary elections in which the Socialists did extremely well among wage earners while the Communist, Catalonia aside, received only modest numbers of worker votes. By stressing its «Socialist» identity the leadership of the UGT hoped that workers who had voted so massively PSOE would also support UGT. On the other hand, so as not to lose some of its support, the CC.OO. sought to avoid becoming labelled as a Communist-controlled organization. (21 of 23 members of the CC.OO. Secretariat are members of the Communist Party, (PCE). It therefore chose to emphasize its ostensibly non-political, functional trade union character.

The government tilt toward the Workers Commissions in the conduct of the elections was deeply resented by the Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) and the General Union of Workers (UGT). It was suspected of playing favorites because the PSOE had come so perilously close in votes received to Prime Minister Suarez's Democratic Center Union Party (UCD) during the June, 1977 parliamentary elections. Moreover, the April, 1978 merger of the Popular Socialist Party headed by Prof. Enrique Tierno Galvan with PSOE not only has added five additional parliamentary seats to the PSOE roster, it also means that the combined vote of the PSP and PSOE in the June elections now brings it to within one percent of that received by UCD. (34.7% and 33.7%) Understandably a UGT victory, in the estimation of the UCD, would only further strengthen its most formidable political opponent.

It, therefore, appeared of great importance for the center right governing party to slow down or halt the Socialist momentum that has resulted from the June, 1977 vote and, more recently, through the consummation of a successful merger with Tierno Galvan's Socialist group. A further success in the trade union elections might enhance PSOE prospects for the parliamentary and municipal elections that may be held next year.

The Communist Party (PCE), on the other hand, received a disappointing 9% in June and therefore is relegated to a marginal role in parliamentary affairs. But since both UCD and the Communists share a common concern in checkmating PSOE it has not been uncommon for them to cooperate in parliamentary votes or at least to find themselves on the same side of various issues.

By late 1977 the economic situation had deteriorated to a point where remedial steps were urgently required. But the popular standing of the UCD was too fragile and uncertain to hazard assuming exclusive responsibility for the institution of unpopular austerity measures. Prime Minister Suarez and his associates therefore engaged in intensive negotiations with the leaders of all parliamentary parties, employer organizations and trade unions, successfully arriving at a general accord on a program of economic stabilisation measures that included a 1977 wage increase ceiling of 22%, appreciably less than the estimated 30% rise in the cost of living. The «Moncloa Pact» as it has come to be known since the talks were held in the building of that name which houses the residence of the Prime Minister, also included accords concerned with the democratic transition process as well as a broad area of social and economic problems. It also committed the parties, most particularly the UCD and PSOE, to a consensus policy-making arrangement designed to minimize conflictual situations during the transition period and the drafting of a new constitution.

The Government's decision to postpone the date of the plant elections from mid-November to mid-January was partly motivated by a need to assure a period of labor peace at least until the wage restraint accords of the Moncloa Pact had been fully arrived at. The end of the year is a traditional time in many firms for the negotiation of new wage agreements. By changing the election date to January many unions were obliged to await the selection of new plant committees before entering into wage bargaining.

At the time of the issuance of the decree ordering elections to start in mid-January the Government sought to defuse PSOE/UGT criticisms by modifying the ground rules so that enterprises with more than 250 employees would be required to vote by the «closed list» method while those of smaller size would continue to employ «open lists». While this represented an improvement over the original arrangement, even under the new voting system the Workers Commissions retained the advantage. The spirit of the Moncloa Pact, notwithstanding, the UCD-PSOE rivalry continued unabated.

Spain, it should be noted, is a country of relatively few large enterprises and a great mass of firms employing small numbers of workers. According to a leading Spanish labor specialist, taking into account the total number of enterprises eligible to elect worker delegates, some 69.3% with 4,150,450 workers employ less than 250 and therefore would utilize the open list ballot while the remaining 30.7% co-

vering 1,841,293 with work forces of 250 or more, would be chosen by the closed list method.²

The elections, it should be noted, were held prior to the enactment of legislation stipulating the function and jurisdiction of the new plant employees committees or what role the unions are to play in the new industrial relations structure. The revision of the Franco era collective bargaining structure had not yet been acted upon at the time of the elections. To make matters worse, on the eve of the commencement of the plant voting, the Government suddenly made public its proposed employee representation bill, one that made no mention of any role for the unions in the enterprise and casting doubt on the validity of the forthcoming elections through the insertion of a stipulation requiring the holding of new plant employee elections within 90 days following the enactment of the proposed statute.

This approach is characteristic of a tactic frequently employed by the Suarez government in dealing with political opponents. It is to contrive a straw man and then to employ it as a bargaining chip in reaching an accord along the desired lines. This is likely to be the role assigned to the manifestly deficient collective bargaining statute proposed by the Government. Now that the elections are over, substantive exchanges are underway between the government employers organizations and the two major left parties to arrive at a compromise formula.

After having manipulated procedural rules in order to prejudice the chances of its Socialist rivals, the government proceeded to employ obstructionist tactics designed to downgrade and disparage the importance of the trade union elections. Aside from the possibly adverse effects this may have on the promotion of enlightened labor-management relations, such conduct appears consistent with the perceived interests of the governing party. In the June elections, the overwhelming majority of industrial workers voted Socialist or Communist to a lesser extent; a repetition was anticipated in the union elections, especially since the UCD has little or no constituency in this sector. As things turned out, their misgivings were realized: at least 80% of the plant delegates elected are supporters of labor organizations linked with the political Left.

As voting commenced, it soon became evident that the Government's effort to disparage the elections had not yet ended. No special

² Jose M. ARIJA: «Revolucion en la Estructura Laboral», *Historia 16*, ano III, No. 21, Enero, 1978, p. 18.

facilities had been established by the Ministry of Labor to furnish prompt and accurate voting results as they became available from the hundreds of localities throughout the country. Election reports as a consequence were issued only after long delays and frequent criticism arose questioning their accuracy and objectivity.

Only the number of delegates elected according to union affiliation was issued, no figures were furnished concerning the actual number of votes received by each labor organization. This was particularly relevant since in one instance a delegate might be elected with as little as four votes while in another with as much as 150. In the absence of such data it is difficult to establish an accurate profile of the voting patterns. The Confusion shown by the deficiencies in the Government's reporting system will probably make it difficult to obtain an accurate breakdown of the voting results for sometime to come.

A bewildering assortment of labor organizations participated in the competition running the gamut from vestigial remains of the former Franco syndical organizations, to regionalists, Communists, Socialists, self-management Socialists, Maoists, independents, company unions, etc. A number of regional organizations in the Basque area joined the regular national labor bodies in competing for support; the Basque Workers Solidarity (STV) that formerly served as the labor arm of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV, a dissident wing of the STV and LAB, the trade union extension of the separatist movement. The historic anarcho syndicalist National Confederation of Labor (CNT) that served as the country's most important labor organization until the civil war period is now reduced to a marginal role in the Spanish labor scene. It decided to boycott the elections although in some scattered instances workers nevertheless voted for CNT candidates.

It quickly became evident at an early stage in the election process that most of these organizations possessed little appeal for Spanish workers and that the CC.OO. and the UGT would emerge as the pre-eminent spokesmen for organized labor. According to figures compiled by Efe, the principal national press service, close to 70% of the 124,579 newly elected representatives in 30,000 enterprises are supporters of the CC.OO. and the UGT.³

³ The reader is cautioned that discrepancies exist between the voting results compiled by EFE and those issued by the Labor Ministry and that neither represent fully accurate accountings, although the labor journalists association have qualified the EFE computations as relatively more reliable than those issued by the latter. According to the highly regarded Madrid daily, *El Pais*, the discrepancies between the two sets of figures

The EFE computations, as reported in the March 28th issue of the Madrid daily, *El Pais*, provide the following breakdown:

	delegates	
Workers Commissions Trade Union Confederation (CC.OO.)	47,111	37.8%
General Union of Workers (UGT)	38,671	31.0
Unaffiliated	15,844	12.7
Workers Syndical Union (USO)	7,381	5.9
Workers Unitary Trade Union Confederation (CSUT-Maoist)	5,985	4.0
Unitary Trade Union (SU-Maoist)	3,376	2.7
Basque Workers Solidarity (STV)	3,140	2.5
Patriotic Workers Commissions (LAB)	771	
National Confederation of Labor (CNT)	339	
Basque Workers Solidarity (dissident-STVa)	309	
Canaries Workers Union (CCT)	240	
Galician Workers Union (SOG)	81	
National Galician Intersindical (ING)	28	
Catalonian Workers Solidarity (SOC)	15	

The remaining 2,289 delegates are distributed among various organizations; independent unions, unions of specific trades or enterprises, especially those in banking, hospitals, commerce and transport.

The EFE survey shows UGT leading in delegates elected in 23 provinces and the Spanish Moroccan enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla while the CC.OO. emerged ahead in 22. The UGT particularly showed strength in the Basque region while the CC.OO. retained a marked edge in Madrid and Barcelona. Only in the conservative rural provinces of Avila (the home of Prime Minister Adolfo Suarez) and Orense did the unaffiliated receive the greatest number. USO gained first place only in the province of Cadiz as did SU in Navarre.

During April, subsequent to the compilation of the EFE election results, the employees of the national railway system (Renfe) voted to select their representatives; 86% of the 70,000 employees participated

derive from the «precarious» nature of the former's sources while the latter's overall figures are distorted by the classification of large numbers of elected delegates (more than 27,000 out of 151,000) as «does not indicate affiliation.» Nonetheless, both computations generally confirm the roughly similar magnitudes of support received by the CC.OO. and UGT.

in the balloting. The CC.OO. obtained 985 delegates and 47.5%, the UGT 681 and 32.9%, while other competing labor organizations received a marginal scattering of support.

The most successful among the regional labor groups has been the Basque Workers Solidarity (STV) which received the second largest number of delegates in the Basque region and reportedly is first in the province of Guipuzcoa.

The elections held thus far do not include farm laborers and small farmers. According to the weekly magazine *Cambio 16* an estimated 250,000 are members or supporters of the farm unions that are affiliated with the various labor confederations. The UGT's Land Workers Federation is considered the largest among them. In all likelihood, however, the situation in the countryside remains fluid and uncertain and it is somewhat premature to make any accurate judgments regarding the degree of support the various competing unions can count upon.

Workers in the large enterprises appear to have given substantial support to UGT while the Workers Commissions has obtained a greater degree of support from medium and small-sized establishments.

Both UGT and CC.OO. have had to rely heavily on foreign assistance to finance the large sums required to conduct a massive nationwide election campaign. The principal source of UGT assistance has been the socialist-oriented trade unions of Western Europe, especially those of West Germany, The Netherlands and Scandinavia. Assistance was also received from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and associated international Trade Secretariats, most particularly the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF).

Because of the strained relations between the Russian and Spanish Communist Parties little if any assistance was received from the USSR but the Soviet-controlled World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) did provide modest financial contributions. Since the Italian and Spanish parties share the generally common political outlook — Eurocommunism, a close relationship has developed on both party and trade union levels. The Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL) has consistently provided extensive assistance to the CC.OO. and the French General Confederation of labor (CGT) has also provided various types of support. It is probable that the Eastern Europeans, especially the Yugoslavs and the Romanians are among the benefactors of the CC.OO. There have been reports in the Spanish press that the East Germans are the source of large financial donations.

What conclusions can be drawn from the election results? It is clear that at least half of Spain's work force considers itself part of the organized labor movement. This part of the labor force is located in the most important and strategically situated sectors of the economy. It is premature to speculate concerning the numbers of those participating in the plant elections who will eventually enroll as dues paying members of trade unions. This will depend largely upon the efficacy of the unions in serving their supporters and the nature of the collective bargaining statute that awaits action by the Cortes.

Spain's labor relations system seems to be evolving along distinctive lines but somewhat comparable to the French and Italian models. The presence of both CC.OO. and UGT representational influence in most industries and large enterprises must lead to multi-union bargaining patterns both at local and industry levels. In fact this has already become an established practice in the collective bargaining negotiations that have taken place since last year. It also appears likely that the Spanish UGT will emerge as the most representative and best-organized among the Socialist-oriented national labor centers in the latin countries of Western Europe.

The trend toward a structure of labor relations that involves a high degree of politicization has been strongly underscored. There are, of course, sound historical antecedents to support this phenomenon, but current social and political developments are serving to strengthen this process. Furthermore, the current economic recession and the consequently enlarged role of the government in the formulation of economic and wage policy can only stimulate further developments in this direction. A worker's wage in Spain today is influenced more by what transpires in the Cortes and the Government than what he can hope to obtain at the bargaining table. Most workers seem to have understood this and they have therefore demonstrated a preference for trade union organizations that are linked with the major parties of the Left. On the other hand, the politicizing process tends to weaken and undercut the role and influence of the unions particularly at this early stage of development and may be detrimental to any effort to instill strong institutional allegiances.

Whatever hopes harbored by politicians of the center right for the creation of an allied trade union force seem to have been largely dissipated. Prior to the elections some efforts were made in Catalonia and elsewhere to encourage and even support various unaffiliated or independent labor groups. The results suggest that most of the organized labor sector is now closely identified with the political Left and little

prospect exists for the establishment of a labor group with substantial influence that would be politically congenial to the UCD.

Present indications suggest that the CC.OO. has emerged as the labor organization with the greatest amount of support. Nonetheless, possibly the most remarkable aspect of the election is the fact that its margin of superiority has now been reduced to a point where it is no longer possible to speak of CC.OO. hegemony. The UGT has become a movement of comparable size and influence. Henceforth, hegemony is to be shared with the UGT. This shift in trade union power relations has far-reaching political consequences.

As recent as 1976 the dominance of the CC.OO. appeared so overwhelming that only the most foolhardy would have had the temerity to predict the degree of relative parity that has now occurred. Since the late fifties following the Communist Party shift to a tactic of infiltration and working inside the official (vertical) unions of the Franco regime, a steady growth in Communist influence took place. By the early sixties it was able increasingly to assume control of the Workers Commissions movement which operated as an opposition force within the official union structure. Despite police repression and frequent employer persecution, by the late sixties and early seventies supporters of the Commissions came to dominate the employees representation committees (Jurados de Empresas) in the coal mines and most important industrial establishments. As a result, for example, an estimated 80% of the present Barcelona leadership of the CC.OO. is composed of men who formerly occupied official positions in the vertical unions. The ranks of the CC.OO. activists also served as an important recruiting source for the PCE.⁴

As the Franco era came to an end, the CC.OO. therefore had good reason to view the future with confidence. In 1974 a small corps of trained dedicated Communist activists in Portugal had succeeded in virtually taking over intact the entire government-controlled syndical structure. A similar strategy was not feasible in Spain, but the influence of the CC.OO. in the government-controlled unions placed it in a dominant position. As in Portugal, France and Italy, Spain seemed destined to possess a labor movement with strong Communist dominance.

Prospects for the UGT at that time were discouraging in the extreme. During the repression of the fifties, the organization had lost

⁴ Slightly less than a third of the 85 members who compose the PCE's Madrid regional committee are officials of the CC.OO.

some of its finest surviving cadres and for many years thereafter, aside from a few remaining enclaves, its presence inside Spain could hardly be observed. Moreover, Socialists maintained a policy of refusal to participate in any organ of the Franco regime, an attitude that facilitated the Communist success in gaining control of the Workers Commissions since they found themselves virtually unopposed in filling a leadership vacuum during the sixties and early seventies at a time of massive worker opposition to the Franco regime. As a result, having enabled their supporters to hold office in the official unions, the PCE emerged from the Franco era with a sizeable number of experienced trade union activists.

UGT membership in late 1975 and early 1976 has been variously estimated at 10,000 to 25,000. But from that time on the organization underwent a phoenix-like resurgence, one that was aided by various tactical errors on the part of the PCE leadership. For example, the success of the Commissions had been due in large measure to its functional efficacy and its ostensibly broad political non-partisan character. But this was compromised by the decision of the party in 1977, intent upon promoting the PCE image, to have 21 of 23 members of the Workers Commissions national secretariat publicly disclose their party affiliations. Moreover, as the PCE tightened its control over the CC.OO., several extreme left political groups with some influence seceded and founded competing labor organizations.

The extraordinary growth of the UGT also underscores the importance that tradition and history sometimes play in the fate of social or political movements. The socialist trade union has been closely identified with the struggles and aspirations of Spanish workers since its inception in the 1880s. Largo Caballero, the leader of the UGT in the twenties and thirties, also served as Prime Minister during the civil war. The fathers of thousands of workers of the present generation are former UGT members. Once the UGT reappeared as a viable trade union alternative many of their sons resumed their families' traditional Socialist allegiances.

The Communist leadership of the Workers Commission was able to count on a more recent record of accomplishment, one that proved partially effective despite the image problem encountered by the Communist Party in the June parliamentary elections. As the Socialist resurgence gathered force, it became clear that the unchallenged predominance of the CC.OO. could no longer be maintained. But after more than 15 years as the leading oppositional force within the Franco-style labor system, the CC.OO. continued to exercise considerable

rable influence. The prestige it enjoyed among many workers and a superiority in experienced cadres have permitted it, despite the over-running of many of its former strongholds by its Socialist rivals, to nonetheless emerge as the leading trade union center. This has also contributed to the disproportionately large influence exercised by Workers Commissions leaders in the internal affairs of the Communist Party.

The strategic outlook of the Socialists has been particularly affected by the election results. We have previously noted that Spanish political affairs are greatly influenced by the rivalry between the two principal political forces; the UCD of Prime Minister Adolfo Suarez and PSOE under the leadership of its talented General Secretary, Felipe Gonzalez. The Socialists are preparing their bid for power and expect to be successful in their quest possibly by 1979 or 1980. But the PSOE leadership has been deeply concerned that, once in power, they might share the fate of their Portuguese colleague, Mario Soares, namely to have achieved broad popular support but crippled in economic policy-making and political flexibility by the leverage accruing to a Communist Party that possesses labor hegemony.

The loss of trade union hegemony is the second body blow rendered PCE hopes and aspirations within less than a year. As the Franco era neared its end, it appeared unquestionable that the PCE would emerge as the principal party of the Left in the Post-Franco period. Then came the startling results of the June, 1977 parliamentary election in which the PSOE received 29% of the vote to only 9% for the Communists.

The present approximate parity suggested by available election results merely represents the inauguration of a contest for trade union superiority that is not likely to be definitively resolved for a number of years. The ultimate outcome will be determined by many factors, above all by the ability of the respective organizations to effectively represent their clienteles.

If the UGT has benefitted from the greater acceptability of its Socialists identity it, nevertheless, faces challenging problems in absorbing and retaining the great mass of new recruits that have flooded in during the recent past. A shortage of experienced leaders is a pressing dilemma.

It is precisely in this area that the Workers Commissions possess an important advantage. The many years of participation in organization and collective bargaining during the Franco era has permitted the

formation of a small army of trained activists and it is probably due to their presence that worker defections to the UGT have not been greater. In fact, the CC.OO. electoral achievement is partly due to the fact that many workers voted CC.OO. because it was the only organization they knew directly. The CC.OO. can therefore be expected to provide formidable competition in the struggle for labor hegemony.

Whatever the ultimate outcome of the trade union rivalry, the first plant elections in four decades for the selection of trade union representatives of the workers' choosing marks the second major electoral process that has been accomplished in the re-establishment of democratic institutions. The results of that popular consultation augur well for the future development of a modern system of industrial relations and democratic labor organization in Spain.

Syndicats et politique en Espagne aujourd'hui

Les élections syndicales qui ont eu lieu en Espagne pendant la première moitié de l'année 1978 ont mis définitivement fin aux quatre décennies d'autoritarisme du régime Franco dans les relations de travail et elles ouvrent l'avènement d'un système de relations professionnelles plus en harmonie avec ceux qu'on retrouve dans les sociétés démocratiques de l'Europe de l'Ouest. Les élections en vue du choix des représentants des salariés ont marqué la deuxième consultation populaire (la première ayant consisté dans les élections parlementaires de juin 1977) à avoir lieu depuis la disparition de Franco. Les résultats auront des conséquences majeures sur l'apparition des formations politiques nationales, sur la restructuration des relations professionnelles et sur les stratégies des principaux partis politiques.

Les élections ont commencé à la mi-janvier et se sont poursuivies jusqu'à mai. Sur six millions de salariés inscrits, la moitié d'entre eux environ ont participé au choix des délégués et des comités d'usine en vue de remplacer ceux qui existaient sous le régime du travail franquiste. Les différentes organisations syndicales en lice, récemment légalisées, rivalisèrent pour obtenir l'appui des travailleurs en recherchant l'élection de leurs militants respectifs.

Le gouvernement, désireux d'empêcher l'Union générale des travailleurs (UGT) d'obédience socialiste d'obtenir la victoire et de contribuer à la remontée du parti socialiste des travailleurs (PSOE), qui avait été rétabli, manipula les règles de base afin de tenir les élections de façon à favoriser la Confédération syndicale des comités de travailleurs (CCOO) contrôlée par les communistes.

Un nombre déroutant d'organisations syndicales ont participé aux élections à partir des vestiges des organisations syndicales franquistes jusqu'aux

régionalistes, aux communistes, aux socialistes autonomes, aux maoïstes, aux indépendants et aux syndicats-maison. La Solidarité des travailleurs basques (STV) et LAB qui sont l'extension syndicale du mouvement séparatiste basque ont aussi recherché l'appui des salariés dans ce district. La Confédération nationale du travail (CNT), groupement anarcho-syndicaliste ancien, qui est aujourd'hui une force marginale sur la scène du syndicalisme, a décidé de boycotter les élections, mais, en quelques endroits dispersés, les travailleurs ont quand même voté pour des candidats s'en réclamant.

Les résultats des élections démontrent que ces organisations ont peu d'attrait pour les travailleurs et que la confédération syndicale des comités de travailleurs (CCOO) et l'Union générale des travailleurs (UGT) ont émergé en tant que leurs principaux porte-parole, car soixante-dix pour cent des représentants nouvellement élus dans 30,000 entreprises appuient l'un ou l'autre de ces mouvements. Parmi les groupes régionaux, la Solidarité des travailleurs basques (STV) a eu le plus de succès en se hissant au deuxième rang en pays basque et en se classant première dans la province de Guipuzcoa.

Bien qu'il y ait beaucoup de controverse concernant le calcul des résultats d'ensemble des élections par le ministère du Travail, il est évident que la CCOO a réussi à faire élire le plus grand nombre de ses partisans. Ce qui est plus important, toutefois, c'est le fait que les comités de travailleurs ne peuvent plus se réclamer d'une hégémonie indiscutable et que le mouvement syndical espagnol comprend maintenant deux centrales syndicales principales qui s'équivalent tant en nombre qu'en influence. Le système espagnol de relations professionnelles semble évoluer vers une forme d'alignement de forces qui se compare aux modèles français et italien. La présence à la fois de la CCOO et de l'UGT dans la plupart des industries et des grandes entreprises doit nécessairement conduire à des négociations multilatérales tant au niveau local qu'industriel. En réalité, cela est déjà devenu un fait accompli lors des négociations collectives qui ont eu lieu depuis l'an passé. Il est aussi apparent que l'UGT émergera comme la plus représentative et la mieux organisée parmi les centrales d'allégeance socialiste dans les pays latins d'Europe de l'Ouest.

La parité approximative qu'indique le résultat des élections est le point de départ d'une lutte pour la suprématie syndicale qui ne sera vraisemblablement pas résolue avant de nombreuses années. L'issue finale dépendra de plusieurs facteurs, en particulier, de l'habileté des organisations à représenter efficacement leur clientèle.

Quelle que soit l'issue ultime de la rivalité syndicale, la première élection au niveau de l'entreprise en quatre décennies pour le choix des représentants des travailleurs marque la deuxième expérience électorale qui a eu lieu depuis le rétablissement des institutions démocratiques. Les résultats de cette consultation populaire augurent bien pour le développement futur d'un système de relations professionnelles et de l'organisation syndicale démocratique en Espagne.