K. Disagreements Between the Generalitat and the Republican Government

(Thematic Correspondence to Chapter Fourteen)

Relations between the Generalitat and the Spanish Republican Government grew more tense as the war dragged on. Gains made for Catalan self-government in the first months of the revolution were never recognised or accepted by the Republican Government. As soon as it could, the Republican Government began to intervene in Catalan politics: in May 1937, the Generalitat lost control of its police and of defence matters. In October 1937 the Republican Government moved to Barcelona and intervened even more directly in Catalan public life. In a speech before Parliament, which had met in the Pins del Vallès (Sant Cugat del Vallès) monastery on 30 September 1938, Juan Negrín, President of the Republican Government, offered the following version of the government crisis of August 1938 and of the government’s relations with the Generalitat.

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La Vanguardia, 1 October 1938

The Three Decrees that Led to the Ministerial Changes in August

On 20 August, ministerial assignments were changed. I offer here a succinct explanation for the change: Three decrees were approved by the cabinet: one pertaining to the militarisation of industry, another pertaining to
what we might call the militarisation of the Special Justice Tribunals, and the third pertaining to the Minister of Justice’s creation of a special court for contraband and capital evasion cases in Barcelona. The Esquerra believes that one or more of these decrees represents, or could represent, a reduction in the Generalitat’s powers or at least a lack of consideration for the responsibilities carried out by the Generalitat. After a brief absence of two days, I found upon returning to Barcelona that Mr. Aiguader had resigned and, in solidarity with him, Mr. Irujo, another of those who have closely collaborated with this government since its beginning. In a letter, Mr. Irujo said that he lamented having to resign and that the government could certainly count on his collaboration from the outside, but that in the end he was only following the political line of the minority Basque nationalists at the time of the Cultivation Contracts Law. I have spared no effort in keeping these two friends and collaborators, first, because I appreciate and hold in high regard the work we have done together, and second, because their resignations might have political consequences. I convinced Mr. Aiguader. Of course, since the resignation of Mr. Irujo was due to the resignation of Mr. Aiguader, I concentrated my efforts exclusively on trying to hold onto Mr. Aiguader. I believe that I even convinced him that none of the three decrees, the one for militarisation of industry, the one about capital evasion and contraband, and the one, perhaps misnamed, for the militarisation of certain special justice tribunals, could be seen as minimising the powers established in the Catalan Statute, that the policy of the government and that my policy from the beginning was the utmost respect for the constitution and the statute. That I would not permit any infringement or weakening of the statute except for a single reason, and that reason only upon full consideration and agreement coming from those who ought to make such decisions, parliament, first and foremost, in those things that represent an absolute war necessity. I openly declared that it would only be a temporary measure, but that I believe there are issues, such as capital evasion, that are and have been, according to the law approved in the Constituent Assembly of Parliament immediately after it approved the statute, responsibilities that fall preferably to the central government. It continues to be the case that the reality of the central government’s move to Catalonia does not imply that the Catalan tribunals or the courts of Barcelona should be the ones that have the final say in these matters. I would say the same if the Catalan appellate court or Barcelona’s regional court ever had the misfortune to have to move to Albacete, Madrid, or Alicante. The issues that had not yet been settled in those high courts, issues that concerned them in particular, should not be decided by Madrid’s Supreme Court, or Albacete’s courts, or the courts of wherever they might be moved.