

countryside, the ravages of some regional unemployment situations, and the great rise in crime, constitute a serious threat for a regime from which so much is expected. This economic crisis helps sustain the atmosphere of doubt about the success of the democratic experience. This effort was already threatened, but is now directly and repeatedly by rightist elements in the army.

Army discontents

Although the military threat to the regime seems to have moved off centre stage since the abortive coup of February 1981, it is probably too early to dismiss repetitions of that sort of event. Many factors have contributed to the undoubted decline of military involvement in politics. These include the determination of the King, who is also Commander-in-Chief, to push forward along the democratic path. There are also clear indicators of the popular will to support him in this initiative. Then there is the reform of the army itself, particularly the retirement of senior officers of advanced age, almost all of them "victors" in the Civil War.

Nonetheless, the Army is frustrated over the economic mess Spain is in, disconcerted by what it sees as excessive decentralization of the state, unhappy still in many cases about the legalization of the Communist party, uneasy with reforms of its own house, angry over the loss of professional prestige, and furious about terrorism, particularly in the Basque country. While the armed forces are probably under control at the moment, especially through the King, a decline in its eyes in one or more of these situations could change things dramatically. There is no tradition of political indifference in the officer corps and that strong corporate sense still lives.

Whether or not regional separatisms are serious, and whether or not terrorism is out of hand, there is one development of the last twelve to eighteen months which seriously worries many longtime observers of the Spanish scene. This is the almost total polarization of the political scene. The main centrist party, the UCD, fell from 35 percent of the popular vote in 1979 to 7 percent in 1982. In that year the Socialists took 202 seats (46 percent of the popular vote) of the 350 in Parliament. The rightist *Alianza Popular* took 106 seats. The centre has been all but wiped out and the consensus government of the first years of the constitutional monarchy has been replaced by confrontation politics. While some movement away from consensus was to be expected in a more firmly-seated democracy, those who know the frequent extremisms of Spanish political history often fear that extremist tendencies are still

powerful in the new Spanish state. After all, they point out, a leftist Parliament with little central ground, but with a large and vocal Right, with crime in the streets, considerable terrorism, rapid social change, economic stagnation, and rising regional separatism, was largely the recipe for the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936. While agreeing that 1983 is not 1936, they urge caution when predicting smooth sailing for Spanish democracy.

Some good signs

This having been said, several elements in the evolution of Spanish society point to likely success. The bourgeoisie is stronger and more numerous now. The King is immensely popular, a strong proponent of democracy, and a clear focus of loyalty for the armed forces. Democracy is also appreciated by a large majority of the population even if disillusionment with it is now growing. Finally, Spain is increasingly tied to Western Europe and most Spaniards feel this is as it should be, even though at times its results may be disappointing.

In this external context, Spain can be expected to continue to focus attention on its only real option — the EEC. NATO will be the subject of considerably greater debate with, at best, slow incorporation of Spain into full membership. The PSOE will, in all probability, increasingly back the alliance and Spain's membership as the party gets even more experience in government. The popularity of Latin American links will continue to attract Madrid's attention to that part of the world, and the Afro-Arab role of Spain will be given at least lip-service for historic reasons and hoped-for future advantage. This continuing "apertura" to the world should carry on reinforcing the Spaniards' acceptance of the democratic system as natural for his time in history and his country's place in geography.

Consequently, I feel that the Spanish democratic experiment, barring a major disruption, will continue to go forward into the mid-1980s. That experiment needs time and stability to settle itself into Spanish consciousness as something natural and permanent, not just another stage of the country's political experience. Terrorism, reactionary elements in the army, separatism, political polarization — all these can damage the process. However, none is likely to stop it if the economy can be improved, or at least not further weakened, in the years ahead. If, however, social and economic disruptions reinforce further the anti-democratic elements so evident in Spain, then even the impressive strengths of the democracy mentioned above may be insufficient to keep extremism, always present in Spanish politics, from gaining the upper hand. □