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PORTUGAL'S FIRST COUNTER- REVOLUTIONARY MOMENT: VILAFRANCADA COUP (1823). MAJOR HYPOTHESIS FOR UNDERSTANDING WHAT HAPPENED

José SUBTIL & Daniel Estudante PROTÁSIO (Portugal)

Abstract

Even today, more than 2 centuries after Vilafrancada's events, between the end of May and mid-June, 1823, there are more hypothesis than certainties about what the meaning and significance of the political facts were. Was Dom Miguel, the second male son of King John VI and Queen Carlota Joaquina, trying to send a military regiment to cross the border and join the insurgent troops of Count of Amarante, and by this way, gain momentum to strike back Lisbon's liberal regime, maybe with French troops support? Who acted as the political brain behind the Portuguese prince, who was underage? His mother, the Queen, Carlota Joaquina, sister of Fernando VII of Spain? Because little attention has been given to the documented study of this subject, in recent years, this line of questioning can be useful to draw the state of the art.

Key Words: 1823 Vilafrancada; 19th century Portugal; John VI (King of Portugal - 1767-1826); Miguelismo; Liberalism; Queen Carlota Joaquina (1775-1830); 2nd Count of Amarante

External influences

Those are: Peninsular War, with the introduction of Revolutionary and Napoleonic ideologies ; Oporto's revolution of 24th August, 1820, and the political coalition formed by military and political factions; the semi-republican Portuguese 1822 Constitution, which antagonized right-wing sensibilities; Brazilian Independence, in the same year, due to disastrous attitudes from members of Portuguese *Cortes*, towards autonomous Brazilian elites; and French military intervention in Spain (1823), which gave a new vigour to those who dreamt of reforming both the Constitution, and the non-written Ancient Laws.

Internal influences and power games

Queen Carlota Joaquina, Prince Dom Miguel, and Count of Amarante are some of the principal and recurrent names, mentioned by historians about this chapter of Portuguese political history. They are supposed to be political, ideological masterminds, the brains behind counter-revolutionary events, between Vilafrancada (1823), Abrilada (1824) and later events. They are called the ultra-realistas, or ultra-right wing. On the other hand, conde de Palmela, aligned with British politics, and General Manuel Inácio Pamplona Corte Real, who served in Napoleon's troops, were King João VI's principal Ministers and Counsellors.

From political factions to political party structures

It may be considered crucial to understand that, between Vilafrancada (1823) and Abrilada (1824) events, major political factions, ideological sensibilities and what can be interpreted, at that time and age, as political parties, in Portugal, are starting to coming to be defined. As Dom Miguel, second male son of King João VI and his Queen Consort, Spanish Dona Carlota Joaquina, stands as one of the leaders of the military uprising of Vilafrancada, his name will define, for better or worse, Portuguese counter-revolution, since then until today. Of course, Miguelista Party cannot be defined as Whigs and Tories in Great Britain or Democrats and Republicans in United States of America in 1823-24. The same cannot be said about those, among Liberals London-orientated (like those gathered around Palmela) or those who preferred General Pamplona pragmatism. Last, but not least, there were those who might be classified as Traditionalists, who mainly desired the proclamation of a Carta de Lei Fundamental, a written constitution containing old regime principles and rules.

Interpretations of Vilafrancada's events (1823)

Vilafrancada events took place between May and June, 1823, in Lisbon and Estremadura province, around Vila Franca de Xira (some forty kilometers from Portuguese capital). What is meaningful to understand is that neither the regiment(s) that rose in insurrection,

neither Dom Miguel, had first any clear idea about bringing down the constitutional Vintista regime, neither the King supported the military forces that left Lisbon in direction of Vila Franca. The days passed by, and the practical solution was for Dom João VI to embrace the popular uprising, and to revert the laws and decisions that took place since 24th August, 1820.

Counter-revolutionary forces of Count of Amarante were waiting inside Spanish territory, for the insurrect regiments from Lisbon and Vila-Franca joining them. But that wasn't necessary, as King Dom João VI, cleverly counselled by General Inácio Pamplona, accepted the new status quo, but ingeniously did not simply proclaimed returning to the previous political system prior to the 1820 Portuguese Revolution. The kingdom should adapt French chartist system, and adopt a Fundamental Law Charter (In Portuguese, Carta de Lei Fundamental), combining traditionalist non-written constitutional principles with new, european codified ones.

In that way, the Miguelista Party, of Dona Carlota Joaquina, Dom Miguel and Count of Amarante (now elevated to Marquis of Chaves), were bitterly overruled by Count of Palmela and General Inácio Pamplona, now Count of Suberra. That explains why, less than one year later, Abrilada events took place; and why a new Carta de Lei Fundamental was object of proclamation in 4th June, 1824, ordering the return to traditional political order and promising the gathering of traditional Cortes by old methods.

Final considerations

Military, diplomatic and political facts and interpretations gain exponentially in being studied together, methodically.

That's the system of analysis the authors applied, and what they will continue to do.

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