

Paul Preston. *Juan Carlos: Steering Spain from Dictatorship to Democracy.*

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by Lynn Purkey

Paul Preston, a distinguished historian in the field of twentieth century Spain, has written a timely and engaging new biography *Juan Carlos: Steering Spain from Dictatorship to Democracy*. The book is an insightful and often probing biography of this visionary King, while also tracing Spain's transition from fascism to democracy during the tenuous period following Francisco Franco's death (1975). Divided into eleven chronologically arranged chapters, the text is followed by an extensive bibliography, endnotes and an index. Moreover, the impeccably researched work boasts a wealth of interviews and private correspondence as well as the usual bibliography. In addition to being of interest to Hispanists and historians, *Juan Carlos* appeals to the casual reader, since it is an intensely personal look at Juan Carlos and other members of the House of Borbón, as well as being an eminently readable text.

Juan Carlos begins by recounting the history of the exiled royal family during the Second Republic (1931-1936) and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), during which Juan Carlos was born (1938). It further catalogues the political intrigues and machinations that characterize the tense relationship between Franco and the exiled King Alfonso XIII (1886-1941), and his heir Don Juan de Borbón (1913-1993), whom Franco excluded from rule with the passage of the Law of Succession, which granted the dictator the right to choose his own successor. One of the author's key contentions is the royal family's dedication to service above personal considerations, which has been a hallmark of Juan Carlos's upbringing and indeed his reign as King of Spain. It is significant that the work ends

with the following assertion: "For Juan Carlos at least, 'to live like a king' has meant sacrifice and dedication on a scale that has given the monarchy a legitimacy that was unthinkable in 1931, in 1939 and even in 1975." This statement also emphasizes one of the other main points of the book, the surprisingly stabilizing role that a seemingly anachronistic institution like the monarchy has played in Spanish politics. These key dates refer to periods of major transition in twentieth century Spain, including the beginning of the Second Spanish Republic (1931) shortly after Primo de Rivera's dictatorship (1923-1930), the end of the Civil War when Franco effectively put an end to the briefly flourishing democracy (1939), and Franco's death (1975), which would usher in a new era of unprecedented stability and democracy.

As Franco's personally selected successor, Juan Carlos was expected to perpetuate the reactionary policies of the authoritarian's *Movimiento* government. However, upon his assumption of power two months after Franco's death, the Spanish monarch shocked the world by a number of actions which would pave the way for democracy. He appointed the liberal Adolfo Suárez prime minister, declared amnesty for political prisoners, and opened the political system to parties beyond Franco's forced coalition of rightwing parties, FET y de las JONS (*Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista*), taking the initial steps which would establish a modern constitutional monarchy. This process was at first threatened by military subversion, terrorism in the form of Basque separatists, and economic instability. Despite these pressures, the King played a crucial role in averting these dangers, especially in the face of a series of military sponsored coup d'états, referred to as *golpismo*. Most notably the *golpe de estado* of 1981 posed a significant threat to Spanish democracy. However Preston's complimentary depiction of Juan Carlos does not mean that other members of the royal family have always escaped criticism. Alfonso XIII is not cast in a favorable light, and is instead depicted as a poor head of state and petulant playboy. Nor does Don Juan fare as well as his son. Outwitted by Franco and in an unenviable position, Don Juan is described as an austere and unforgiving father, who would attempt to regain the crown at all costs, to include "sacrificing" his ten-year old son to the Franco Regime. Nevertheless, Don Juan is also pictured as a man of unexpectedly liberal political views for one attempting to reestablish the monarchy. Indeed, his liberal political views and the strict upbringing he insisted upon for his primogenitor may to some degree be the source of Juan Carlos's ultimate rejection of Franco's reactionary politics, as well as his dedication to public service.

In a text bursting with first hand observations, letters, and newspaper articles, Preston relates the subtleties of a period fraught with intricate political negotiations and plotting. Complicated by Franco and his wife's paranoia, the disapproval of the *falangistas*, who opposed the monarchy, as well as Don Juan's liberal

views and political ineptness in communicating them to Franco, Juan Carlos was forced to negotiate the increasingly difficult terrain of Spanish politics in order to gain favor with the *caudillo*, without divulging his own democratic leanings. The chapter regarding *golpismo* is also noteworthy. Juan Carlos's role in preventing a junta from ruling the country is of substantial historic interest, and makes evident the King's valor and decisiveness in the face of danger. Ultimately Preston believes that the monarchy has a bright future in Spain. Citing the King's positive role in stabilizing the country after Franco's death, he predicts that the seemingly outdated office of the monarchy may play a similarly positive role in Spanish politics in the future, as the King remains a neutral figure in the country's sometimes bitter party rivalries and thereby helps maintain the balance of power.

One of the most poignant and noteworthy elements of the book is to be found in the first two chapters, which describe Juan Carlos's childhood and trace his often troubled relationship with his father. At the age of eight, the young prince first attended boarding school of Ville Saint-Jean under the austere direction of the Marian Brothers in Fribourg, Switzerland. During this time, the prince had little family contact at his father's insistence, since the latter already sought to mold him into a future monarch. The sacrifices Juan Carlos made are further highlighted in the second chapter, which tells of an agreement made between Don Juan and Franco, in which Juan Carlos would be educated in Spain and groomed to some extent to eventually become king, although who exactly would become king was a "bargaining chip," which Franco would leave unresolved until 1969. In a brilliantly legitimizing move, Franco brokered a deal with the royal family to allow Juan Carlos to be educated in Spain, while his family continued to live in exile in Estoril, Portugal. Under this agreement, the ten-year-old Juan Carlos returned to Spain, where a specially selected group of teachers taught him and seven other children from aristocratic or well to do families. In these two chapters Preston has managed to captivate the child's sense of isolation and estrangement from his family, while also describing a very ordinary boy, who is a friend, a gifted athlete and an average student. Another particularly moving event in the young man's life is the death of his younger brother Alfonso, in a shooting accident at the family's home in Portugal while Juan Carlos was home from the military academy in Zaragoza. This episode has long been a historical mystery, since Franco ordered the press be silent regarding the event. However, Preston gleaned from interviews that the future King was probably holding the gun when it discharged, and that this forever changed the relationship between Juan Carlos and Don Juan, who was said to favor the his younger son. This was to be characteristic of a relationship that only worsened when Franco made Juan Carlos his heir.

While a great deal is said about Juan Carlos's youth and his relationship with his father, curiously little is said about the his dealings with his wife and his children, although Preston speculates on Queen Sofia's role in helping her husband

become King, and tells of Franco's initial disapproval of the match due in part to religious considerations, because the Queen had been Greek Orthodox prior to her marriage. However, upon closer acquaintance, Franco and his wife were charmed by the new Queen, and impressed with her command of Spanish and innate intelligence.

Paul Preston is presently the Príncipe de Asturias Professor of Contemporary Spanish History at the London School of Economics, and formerly held the position of head of the International History Department. He has written a number of books on Spain, such as an authoritative portrait of the dictator, *Franco: A Biography*. The author's other published works include: *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War: Reform Reaction and Revolution in the Second Spanish Republic 1931-1936*, *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain*, *Salvador de Madariaga and the Quest for Liberty in Spain*, *The Politics of Revenge: Fascism and the Military in 20th Century Spain*, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, *Comrades! Portraits from the Spanish Civil War*, and *Doves of War: Four Women of Spain* (translated into Spanish as *Palomas de guerra: cinco mujeres marcadas por el enfrentamiento bélico*).