Barcelona (1968-1979): Civic Pressure and the Spanish Transition to Democracy

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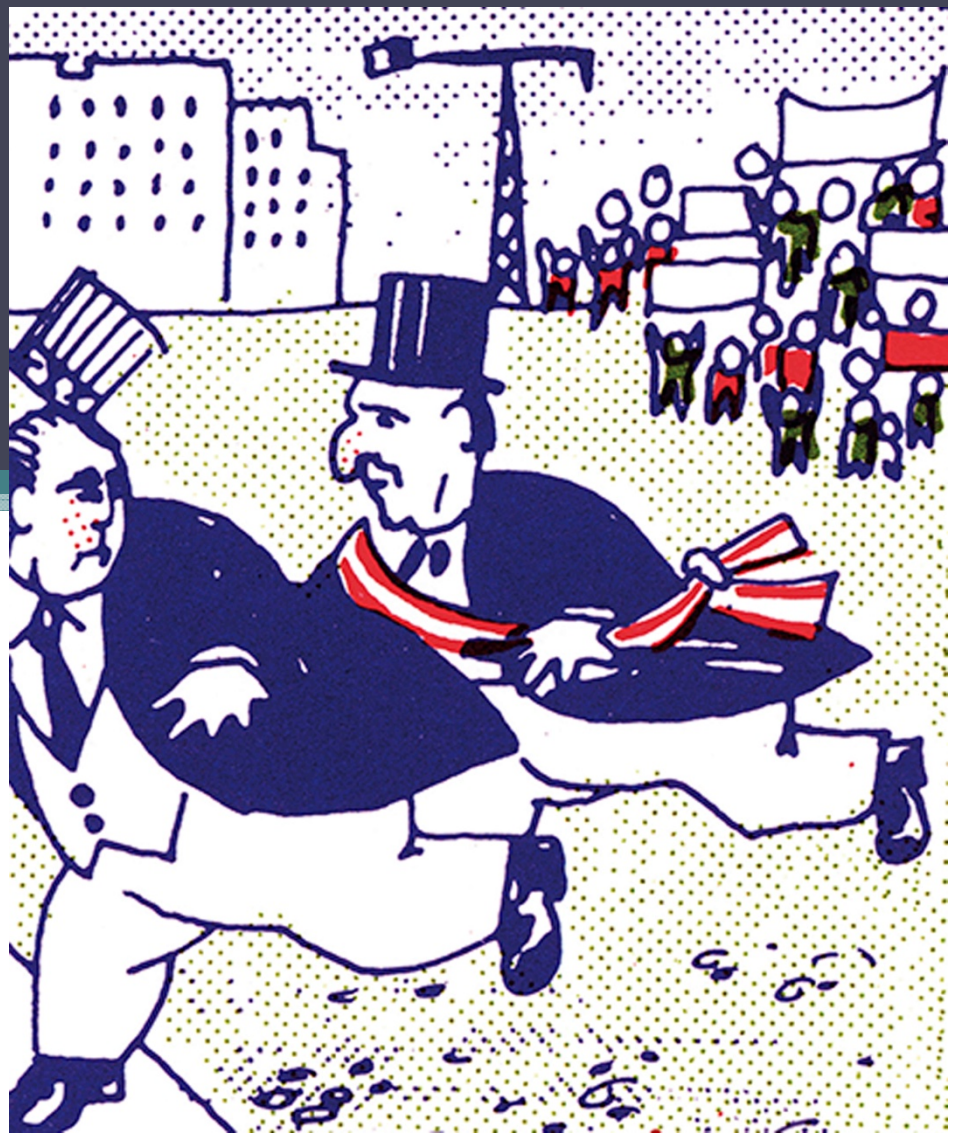

Catalan Observatory
London School of Economics

November 2015

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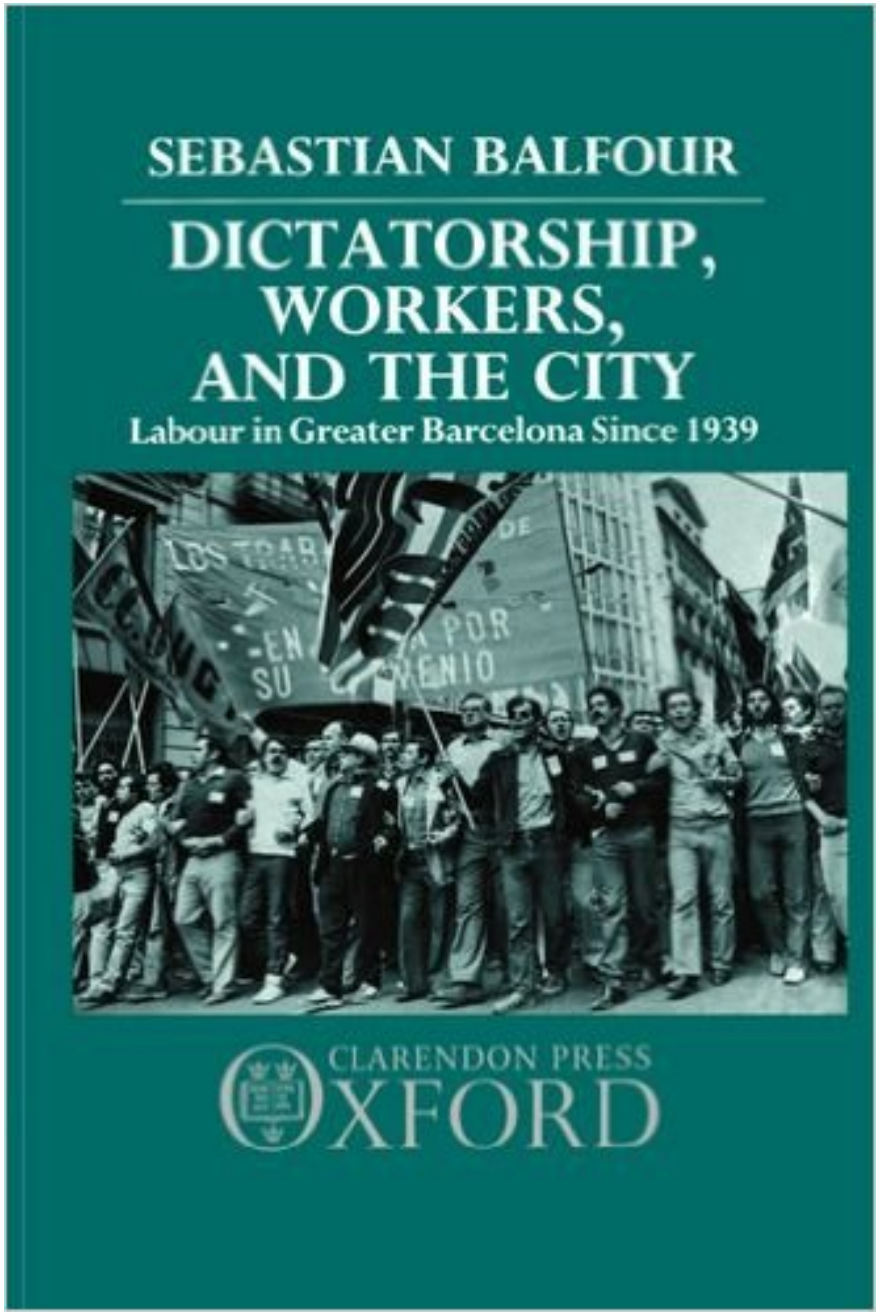
Barris, veïns i democràcia

El moviment ciutadà i la reconstrucció de Barcelona (1968-1986)



Social and urban movements as historical agents of democratic change

"Democracy was won from below. Plans to extend the regime after the death of its creator were undermined in the early Seventies by the persistent mobilisation of workers, students, residents associations and movements demanding autonomy, among others. [...] In practice, social agitation became the driving force of political change". (Sebastian Balfour: *Dictatorship, workers and the city*)

"The Catalan break before election was civic and cultural. The hegemony of the political and democratic institutions, gathered in the Assembly of Catalonia, manifested openly in the street after the death of General Franco". (Andreu Mayayo: *La ruptura catalana*)

- There is an ongoing historical debate in Catalunya and Spain, rather more political than academic, about who led the transition and over the extent and the quality of the democracy the process achieved.

- However, between the mainstream theses that insist it was the work of various political elites and especially the King, who led the change, or the alternative theses of people who condemn this change for not being sufficiently democratic and which is now known as the Regime of '78, to see that there was no acknowledgement of what Balfour said before and I say now: the driving force behind political change wasn't the King, nor Adolfo Suárez, nor Rodolfo Martin Villa, nor Santiago Carrillo, nor Felipe González, nor Jordi Pujol.

- The driving force behind the transition to democracy were the social movements and civic pressure. This was very clear in Barcelona where the civic movement and residents associations, alongside the workers' movement, forced this exceptional political, social and cultural rupture which had repercussions far beyond Catalunya and the rest of Spain.

- The drive for change was coming from the streets. And above all after the success of the big demonstrations demanding amnesty on the 1st and 8th of February 1976 in Barcelona.. Organised by the anti-Franco opposition and the Catalan Assembly and driven by andin the name of the residents' associations and their federation (FAVB) these demonstrations marked a watershed in the transition process.

Manel Armengol

Barcelona, February 1, 1976. Police charges against demonstration for amnesty organized by neighborhood associations and beats Garcia Faria and Xirinacs.

Manel Armengol

Barcelona, February 1, 1976. María Ángeles Rivas, civic leader of Nou Barris, member of FAVB and communist militant, on the foreground of the photo.

The impact of February 1976 was fixed by neighborhood's press, Manel Armengol's photos and a famous editorial of *Le Monde:* 'The Catalan challenge'. But the terms "challenge", "open city and free from fear" and "Battle of Barcelona" shared *The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, The Times* and *The New York Times*.

Harold Sieve
The Daily Telegraph (1976)

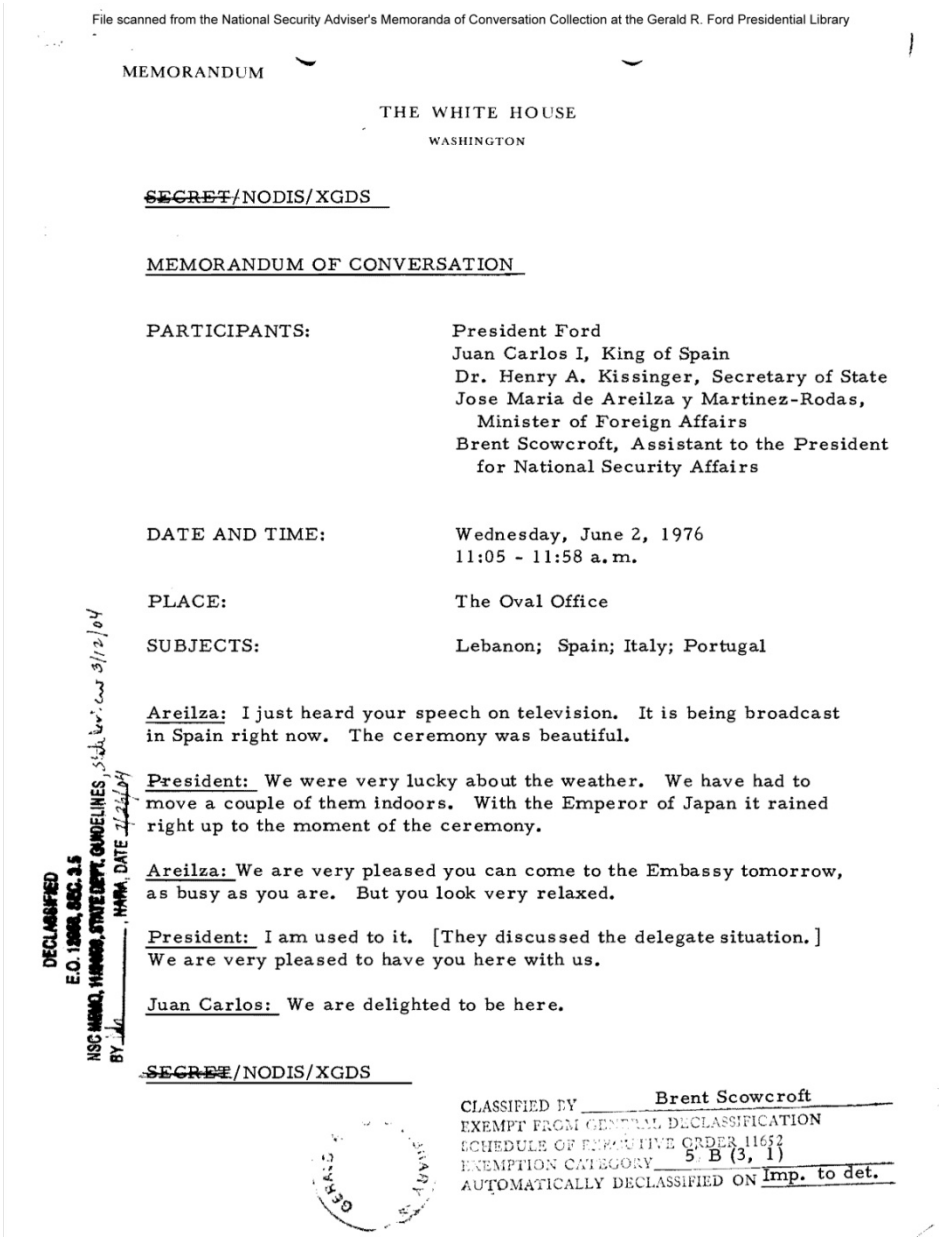
- "It will be difficult for the government of King Juan Carlos to ignore what is without doubt the biggest popular protest Spain has seen since the end of the Spanish Civil War".

- "Dissident Barcelona gave King Juan Carlos the cold shoulder with a silent demonstration of thousands of firemen, police and other public sector workers at the start of the first official visit of his reign".

Roger Matthews
The Financial Times (1976)

- He described a Catalunya in which everything that until then had been clandestine was now emerging into the light, lending Barcelona a much more tangible air of change than Madrid.

- It is no coincidence that his report in *The Financial Times* gave special attention to the community and communist movement in the factories and neighbourhoods of Barcelona and the metropolitan area.



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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~SECRET~~/NODIS/XGDS

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: President Ford
Juan Carlos I, King of Spain
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State
Jose Maria de Areilza y Martinez-Rodas, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

DATE AND TIME: Wednesday, June 2, 1976
11:05 - 11:58 a.m.

PLACE: The Oval Office

SUBJECTS: Lebanon; Spain; Italy; Portugal

Areilza: I just heard your speech on television. It is being broadcast in Spain right now. The ceremony was beautiful.

President: We were very lucky about the weather. We have had to move a couple of them indoors. With the Emperor of Japan it rained right up to the moment of the ceremony.

Areilza: We are very pleased you can come to the Embassy tomorrow, as busy as you are. But you look very relaxed.

President: I am used to it. [They discussed the delegate situation.] We are very pleased to have you here with us.

Juan Carlos: We are delighted to be here.

~~SECRET~~/NODIS/XGDS

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NSC MEMO, 11/24/98, STATE DEPT. GUIDELINES
BY ____ NARA, DATE 3/12/04

John Hoagland, in an account published in 1976 simultaneously in *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian*, compared Barcelona with Prague in 1968. It's therefore hardly surprising that both Francoism and the regime that succeeded it, led by the King, should have been concerned about the Catalan capital and its role in the transition.

The King expressed his fears about Barcelona on June 2, 1976, during his first visit to Washington as head of state. He spoke openly and confidentially to President Gerald Ford and Henry Kissinger in the White House.

SPAIN

I would be very interested in hearing about developments in Spain since you came to power.

Juan Carlos: All the political groupings didn't want any abrupt change, so it has gone slowly but smoothly. I think it could have gone a little faster, but it is moving. We have had some troubled times -- last February, for example. And the press has not been helpful.

President: It never is.

Juan Carlos: We have over 150 mini-political groups. We are telling them they must get together. We are having the national elections before the municipalities. That was a mistake my grandfather made in 1931. They will be this fall and the municipalities next spring.

The first general election wasn't held in the autumn of 1976, as Juan Carlos I told Gerald Ford, but on June 15, 1977. And the municipal elections that the King anticipated in the spring of 1977 were postponed for two years, until April 3, 1979, after the second general election.

It's clear that the ghost of April 14, 1931 and the spectre of the proclamation of the Republic, in an updated version that had a lot to do with strength of the workers and neighbourhood movements in Barcelona, was the ghost that haunted the Spanish transition to an extent much greater than has been admitted up until now.

All of this came under the strict control of the minister of Government, Rodolfo Martín Villa, who was well aware of the strength of the workers', residents' and Catalan movements as he was civil governor of Barcelona from 1974 to 1975. (Photo: with Samaranch and mayor Masó).

BUTLLETÍ DE L'ASSOCIACIÒ
DE VEINS – CENTRE SOCIAL DE

SANTS

21 DESEMBRE 1975

FRAGA PASO APUROS EN SANTS

"LOS TOROS ESTABAN SIN AFEITAR", COMENTO EL EX MINISTRO

Ayer tuvo el ex ministro Fraga su día más difícil de su visita política a Barcelona, que termina hoy con la adjudicación de los Premios de Periodismo que llevan su nombre y que alcanzan la segunda edición. En Sants tuvo que dar respuesta a los temas políticos que más preocupan hoy en Catalunya y que le fueron planteados sin ambages. (Información en pág. 6)

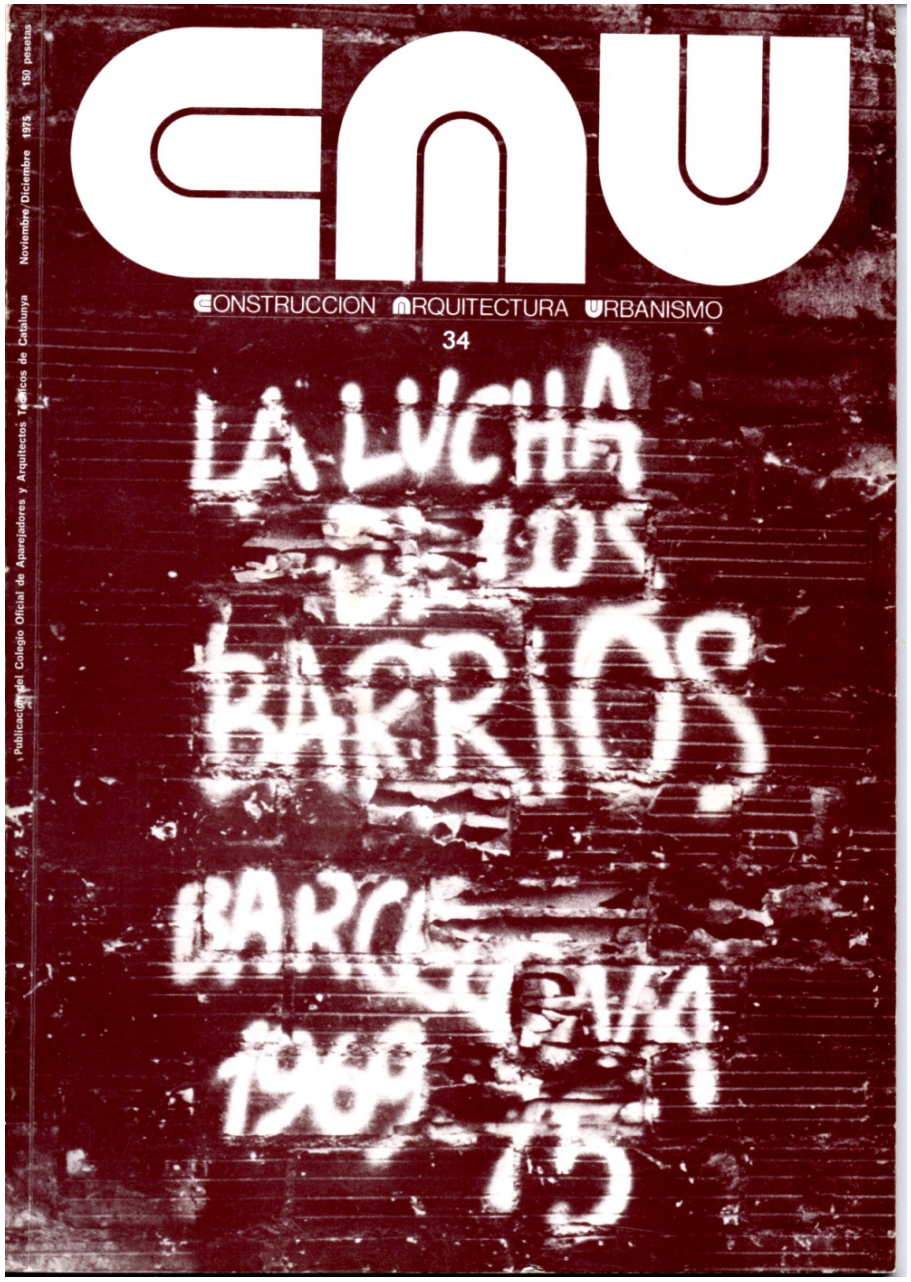
pla comarcal: una nueva agresión

vers un regidor democràtic

LLENGUA CATALANA: QUÈ FER AL NOSTRE DISTRICTE?

FRAGA EN EL CENTRO SOCIAL

December, 1975. Just before being appointed minister, Manuel Fraga visited the neighborhoods of Sants and met with neighborhood leaders. "We confirm the strength of neighborhood associations and strong communist infiltration" he wrote in his memoirs.



What was this social movement, capable of arousing so much fear, composed of? It was summarised in a confidential report that the civil governor Martín Villa received in the spring of 1975. It explains that the residents' movement in the Catalan capital was "an ideal platform" in the struggle against the dictatorship "that may have greater influence" than other opposition groups such as CCOO, Catalan Assembly or the grassroots Church.

The report said that the neighbourhood associations had succeeded in coming into being through the effective control of a Federation legally registered as a group of bourgeois businesses. The Francoist authorities supported this FAVB with the idea of neutralising (without success) the residents' movement that arose at the end of the Sixties with working class roots and under communist hegemony.

Origins and development of the urban movement

- The origins of the Barcelona citizen's movement can be found in Catalunya's rich fabric of traditional associations found in working-class neighbourhoods.
- Its origins can also be seen in the urban mobilisations of 1930, such as the rent strike led by the CNT.
- But it was above all the tram strike in 1951 that took the urban movement forward in a way that made it a key watershed moment. 1951 revived a traditional form of dissidence in Barcelona and could count on a new form of working class and urban mass action in which grassroots Catholics and communists for the first time found themselves united in the same struggle.
- During the 50s and 60s huge numbers of immigrants arrived in neighbourhoods or shanty towns and the activities of social centres and Catholic organizations (JOC, HOAC, ACO) along with the activities of Communists and other antiFranco militants created the network in which the movement could grow.
- Some residents' associations were legal under the Associations Law which the Franco regime passed in 1964 as a token gesture.
- In 1968 Bandera Roja and the clandestine neighbourhood commissions were born. In 1974 some neighbourhood associations joined the legal and bourgeois FAVB in order to subvert it.

Porcioles Barcelona (1957-1973). A city or urban model endorsed by Franco and Catalan bourgeoisie but criticized by the civic movement forged in neighborhoods during the 60s.

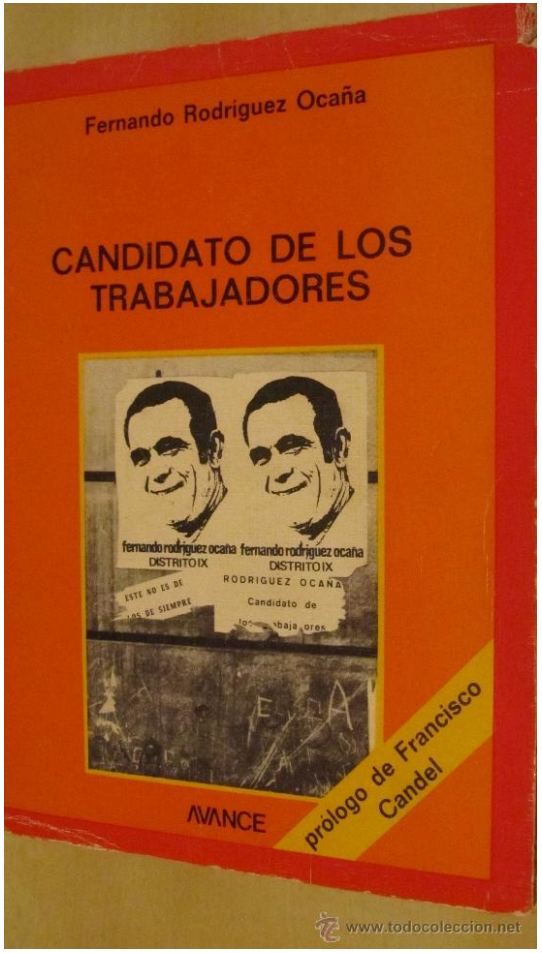
In two secret police reports from 1973 and 1975 title Neighbourhood Plan, Francoism was warned: “At the end of the Sixties subversive organisations used Barcelona as a test bed to develop agitation and later politicisation of working-class neighbourhoods.”

In this context, and among comparative references between late Francoist Spain and the revolutionary Catalunya of the Thirties, the report “The correct focus for the FAVB” which Martín Villa received in 1975 concluded: “One has to give ground to the people … if not they will be unstoppable.”

AV Sant Andreu / Centre Social de Sants

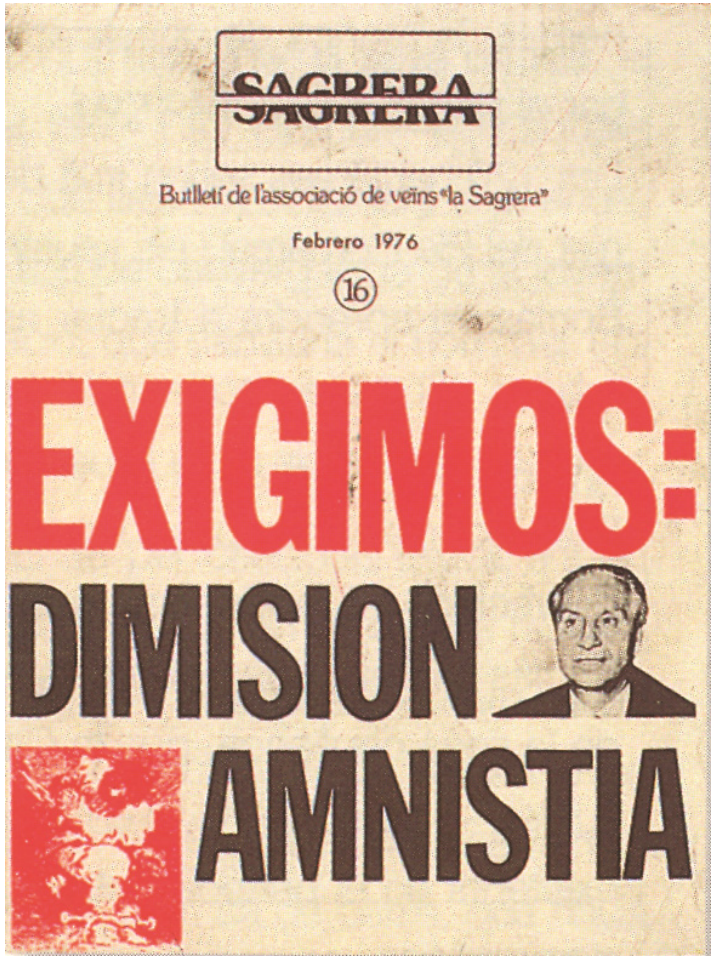
Rodolfo Martín Villa was meeting the FAVB every month as a way of taking the temperature of the anti-Franco opposition. This is no to say that the Barcelona governor didn't also use repressive measures against the residents' movement. In 1975, some neighborhood associations suffered fascist attacks.

"Think about the seriousness of the moment. What happens with neighborhood associations will be a precedent (a reflection, if you like) of what will happen in the next political fight. Respect the color out if it ensures the isolation and neutralization of communism" (Report "The correct focus for the FAVB", April, 1975).



1973 The communist Rodríguez Ocaña won local elections in a working-class district. Dictatorship annul it.

1973-1975 Mayor Masó spoke with neighborhoods but precisely because it was finally replaced by Viola, a man of Porcioles.



1975-1976 Viola also was dismissed as Porcioles result of civic pressure. Socías, a man of Martín Villa, was the last Francoist mayor.

Signs of Barcelona break

The dismissals of Porcioles (May 1973) and Viola (December 1976), as a direct result of popular pressure are clear signs of a factual break that led to landmarks such as the presence of residents' associations on the municipal commissions of control set up in 1977.

Other signs of a break came in the form of the many occupations by residents of vacant lots and buildings and the hijacking of buses as a form of protest. And, definitively, many popular struggles.

Arxiu Vital

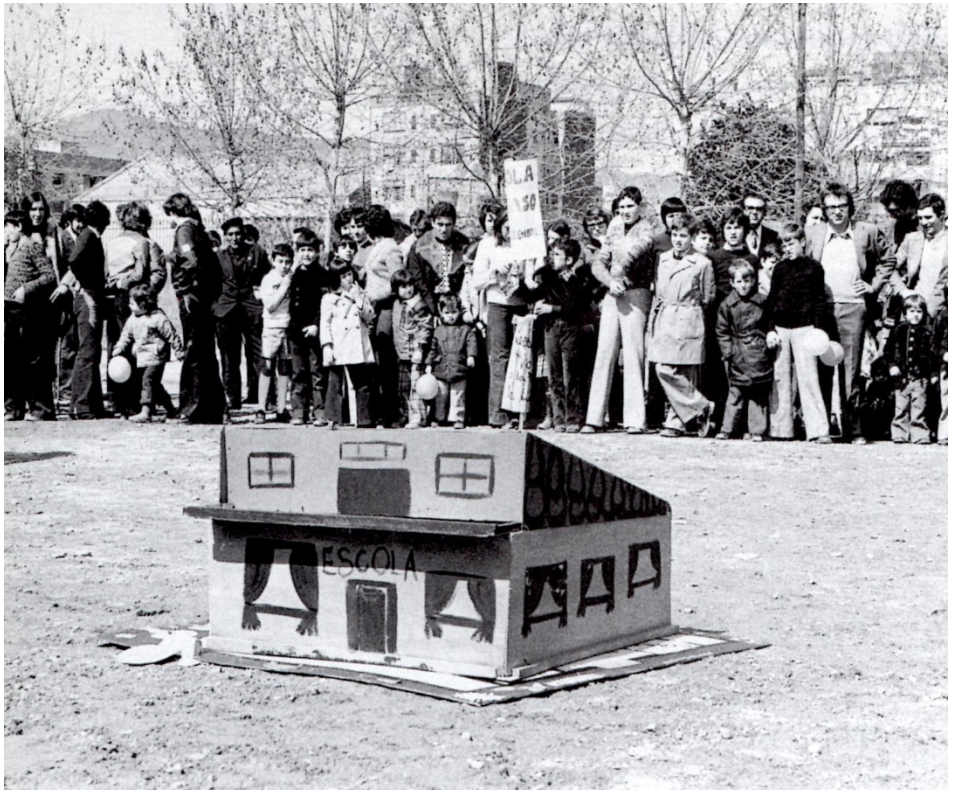
June 7, 1978. Trade unionist and communist neighborhood leader Manuel Vital hijacked the bus he was driving to claim their service in Torre Baró, Nou Barris.

In the late 1970s, the 100 neighborhood associations in the city of Barcelona had 1,200 activists and 70,000 members.

No one, no political party, could match this number of members. The PSUC, for example, had a record number of 30,000 in all Catalunya in 1977. The Socialists didn't have more than 12,000. And CDC, Pujol's party, had barely 10,000 members. Nor did CCOO, the biggest trade union, with around 60,000 members in Catalunya, have the power to call on as many people as the residents' associations in Barcelona.

In the Seventies, only one institution could compete for the hegemony of the residents' associations: FC Barcelona.

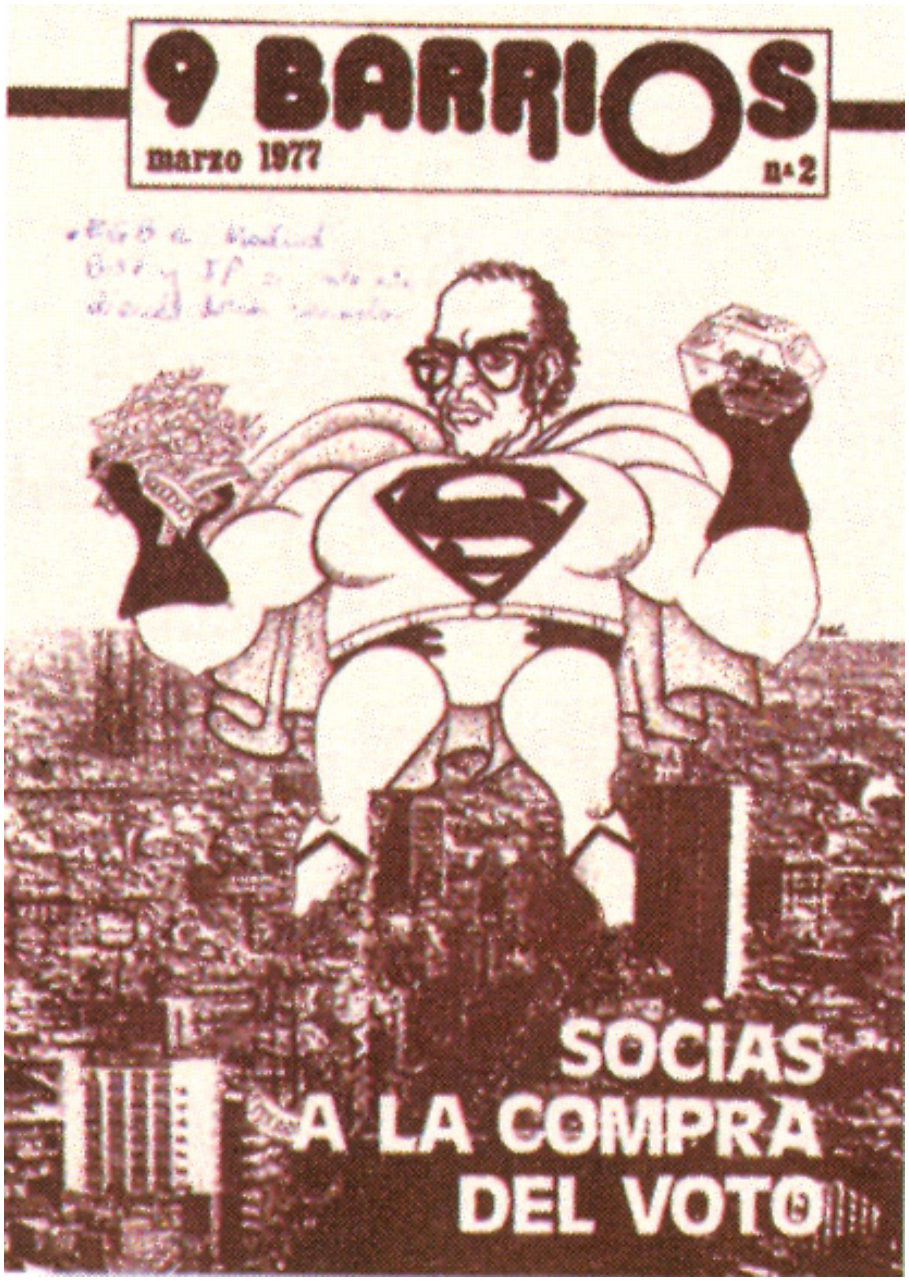
The accumulation in Barcelona of public capital in the form of vacant lots, land and buildings allowed the new democratic city council to pursue progressive policies after 1979. Schools, parks and gardens, health centres, cultural facilities, all of this was acquired on behalf of the city and its residents.



Neighborhood struggles and victories (1970-2010)

- Less than 10% of residents' victories came under the mandate of the Francoist mayors Porcioles, Masó and Viola, between 1970 and 1976.
- From December 1976 to April 1979, under the mandate of mayor Socías Humbert and his brief successor Font Altaba, they won 29 neighbourhood battles.
- During the period of municipal transition they chalked up a victory every month.
- It's true that the majority of the residents' victories (65%) were achieved under democracy, although many of these struggles began earlier.
- There was only on average two residents' victories a year in the democratic period, the 30 years in which Barcelona was governed by the socialists Narcís Serra, Pasqual Maragall, Joan Clos and Jordi Hereu.


PLA' COMARCAL
¿es éste tu deporte?
associació de veïns del districte Vº


9 BARRIOS
marzo 1977
nº 2
SOCIAS
A LA COMPRA
DEL VOTO

Jordi Pujol, about the Ribera Plan in the Sixties: “We started work, but both politically and socially the initiative had come at a bad time and was soon abandoned. It reappeared years later on the occasion of the 1992 Olympic Games and produced today’s Vila Olímpica in Poblenou”.

This social and political “bad time” mentioned by Pujol was the rise of anti-Francoism and, with it, the neighbourhood movement that won its first victory with the halting of the Ribera Plan and its forward-looking idea of protecting the beaches from speculation so that, in 1992, the city could opened up to the sea. That was the left’s only real victory in Barcelona, according to the writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán.

Pujol: "It happens often –and the Vila Olímpica is one example- that big projects and great works are the result of a series of failed attempts that finally materialize when circumstance or the economic, political or social juncture or the collective state of mind makes them easier".

The assumption that circumstance affects the project could easily lead to the thesis that the Barcelona model is a liberal, across-the-board one, gestated during the pro-development phase of the dictatorship by the bourgeoisie and financial capital, with the support of politicians and certain professional and intellectual sectors, but did not materialize until well into the democracy because it was derailed by the socio-political and economic juncture of the end of Francoism and the Transition. And specifically the neighbourhood movement. It is the same movement that forged the foundations of the Barcelona model if we understand it as a way to love the city and put it at the service of citizens.


FEM NOSTRA BARCELONA
VIDA ALS BARRIS
II Setmana de les Associacions de Veïns
Exposició a les Rambles
del 1 al 8 de Juny

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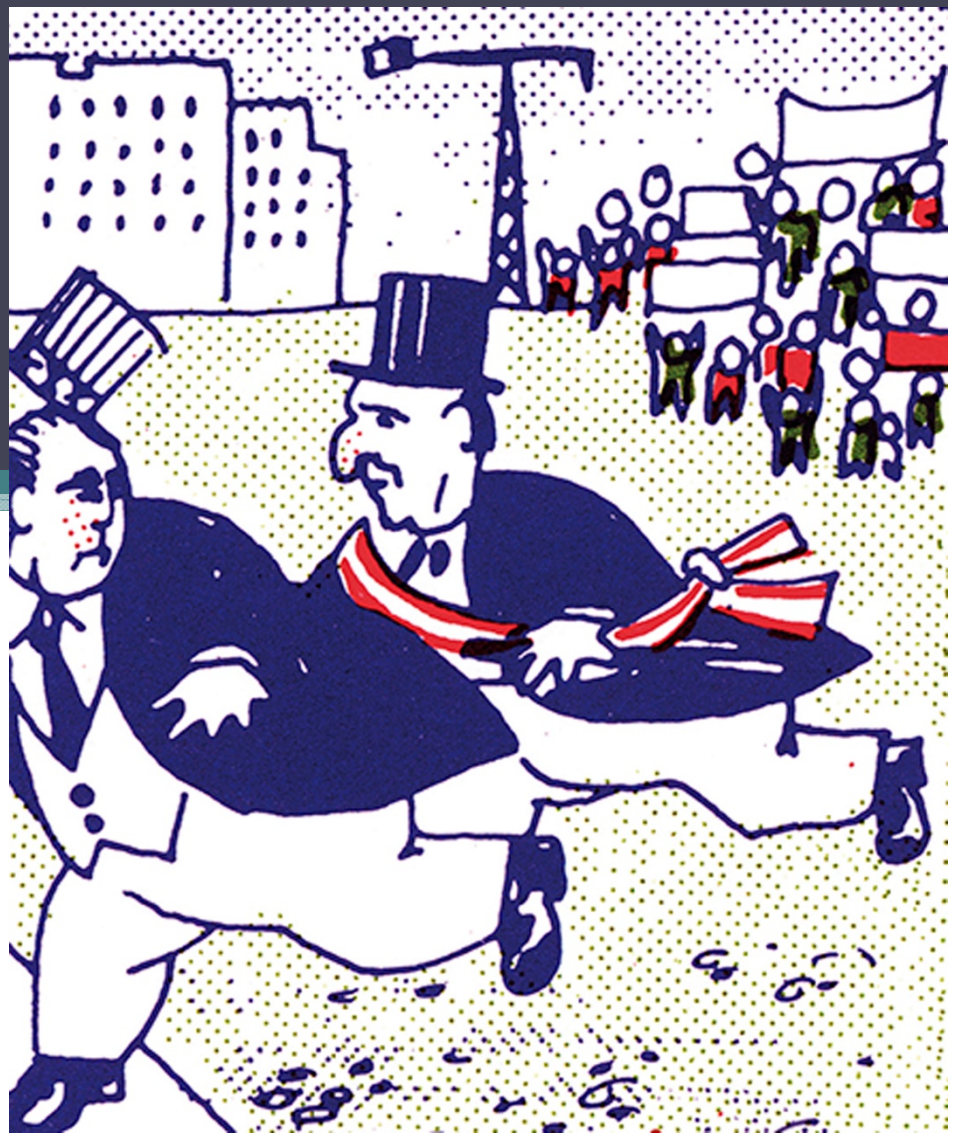

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