

**FROM ALBENS TO PARIS. THE LIFE OF A BASQUE
SPANISH DEPUTY AND MINISTER OF FRENCH DESCENT.
FERMIN LASALA Y COLLADO (1832-1917)**

Carlos Rilova
(Université de Bilbao)

I. Infidels ahoy. The Dreyfus Affair, the French secret service at Madrid and Fermín Lasala y Collado

It was the year 1895. Captain Dreyfus has been sent to the Devil's Island months ago but, doubtless, the pro and anti-dreyfusard hysteria still remained among the streets of Paris and, in fact, amidst the whole nation.

That was not the end of the world, of course, despite that Western power's business worked as usual. Great Britain has its own troubles in Canada, in Ireland, inside the motherland, in India, in Afganistan... The other Western giant, the United States, got their own plans against the old Europe. Its eyes were searching for an empire, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippine Islands looked like a good lot. Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt, the most renowned face of the new born yankee imperialism was quite sure that this prize must be the first reward of the new "bigstick" diplomacy. A bigstick that must fell over the head of the faded spanish empire, which was determined to resist against all odds where others, like Great Britain in Guyana, had retreated before the big Northern Republic.

France itself, leaving aside captain Dreyfus' hypothetical treasons and misadventures, got plans about its own increasing empire in Africa. A troublesome battlefield where british, germans and italians were looking too for their own more or less exaggerated "Lebensraumen"... to say nothing about the spanish ambitions in the western coast of the black continent around Muni and the so called river of Gold, where Madrid Navy officers and soldiers, who sailed from the strategical outpost of Fernando Poo island, were dealing with local chieftains, giving them old rifles and spanish flags...¹

¹ On these Spanish maraudings around Muni see Archive du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (hereafter AMAE), Affaires Diverses, 32, 1889-1891, rapports dated the 8th and 9th October 1890.

In other words : in 1895 each Western country – except the United States, perhaps – was afraid of any other Western country. Everybody expected a great war that would involve almost the whole world. In fact, as we know nowadays, it was necessary to wait nine years more, but meanwhile fears and suspicions dominated the minds and hearts of our grandgrandparents. The loyal servants of these states were not, of course, an exception to that rule. That is the case, for example, of the spies that France – just as any other country – kept in its Madrid embassy.

One of them made a great discovery. Or at least he presented to the Quai d’Orsay as if it really was a great discovery : the voting of 1895 in Spain gave the victory to Antonio Canovas’ party, that one mistifyingly called “liberal-conservative”. That meant, as it was usual in nineteenth century politics, that the booty – that is : the state institutions – must be shared among the Spanish right-wing followers.

Fermin Lasala y Collado, was part of that “preferred list”. He was an old friend of Canovas and a loyal member of the liberal-conservative party. The spanish embassy at Paris should be his prize. The spy warned his masters about him. He has investigated. Deeply. And he has discovered another captain Dreyfus.

Indeed, that Lasala was, in fact, a Lassalle “tout court”. His father was a Jew of French nationality, born in Bayonne. As his affairs were quite unsuccessful there, he decided to cross the border to search a better future in Spain during the first years of the nineteenth century. As it seems the little city of San Sebastián, not far from the French south-western border, was the perfect place to recover his fortune. The inconstant goddess smiled on him, indeed. There the supposed bayonese Jew found a delicious wife among these basque christians of San Sebastián. She was the daughter of a salted goods merchant. After this first step towards his “defrenchfication” the treacherous Lassalle followed on. As Spain was invaded by Napoleon’s Army, he changed his name and his nationality fearing an hostile reaction from his spanish neighbours, both against him and against his increasingly prosperous business. To sum up, and in the spy own words, Fermín Lasala y Urbietta : “était un juif de nationalité française, né à Bayonne, qui ayant fait de mauvaises affaires dans le commerce du commencement de ce siècle, passa la frontière espagnole et s’établit à Saint Sébastien où il épousa la fille d’un marchand de salaisons. C’était l’époque des terribles guerres du 1^{er} Empire et Lassalle,

craignant pour sa vie et ses intérêts, changea son nom pour celui de Lasala et sa nationalité française pour la nationalité espagnole¹ ».

Those were the obscure origins of the new spanish ambassador. But there was more dangers to be put before the eyes of the Third Republic guardians. Indeed, Fermín Lasala, the son of that renegade, has been mayor of San Sebastián before the revolution that dethroned queen Elizabeth II during the year 1868. His supporters were the most reactionary rabble of that city. Nevertheless that detail did not became a serious obstacle to change his coat when it was necessary, sliding from the conservative party to the revolutionary forces. To celebrate this change of mind and the success of the revolution he ordered to ring all the city bells. That was enough to get him a seat in the new Parliament at Madrid, where he shown again his legendary cleverness. As it seems Fermín Lasala junior discovered quickly in which hands rested the Power, with capital “P”, and modulated his political discourse in that way. Then he became enough reactionary to attract the admiration and the patronage of Canovas del Castillo. The first booty he obtained from his hands was the Ministry of Public Works. After that he get a title, the duchy of Mandas, claimed by his wife, Cristina. As far as the spy knew, that opened him the doors to the spanish Peerage and so he became one of the “Grandes” who could cover his heads before the king. All this increased his reactionarism. In the spy own words again: this career, developed under the protection of Canovas, “accentua” his “ultramontaines et conservatrices” points of view and his disdain against the republican principles².

The spy said that, in fact, Fermín Lasala y Collado admired kaiser Wilhelm’s policies, and believed that Spain should follow or imitate them. That and the relationship with the Rothschild clan,

¹ See AMAE Espagne Affaires Diverses 34 1894-1895. Serie B Carton 20. Documents Secrets, the date of that dossier it is 3th january 1895. On the political atmosphere in France during the affair, which made possible such documents as this *rapport*, see Dominique Lejeune, *La France de la Belle Époque 1886-1914*, Armand Colin, Paris, 1991, p. 11 and p. 16-17, Pierre Birnbaum (dir.), *La France de l’affaire Dreyfus*, Gallimard, 1994, Pierre Birnbaum, *L’Affaire Dreyfus. La République en péril*, Gallimard, 1994, a volume which offers an excellent visual history of the famous affair, and, of course, Philippe Oriol, *J’Accuse ! Émile Zola et l’Affaire Dreyfus*, Librio, Paris, 1998, that edited the most important writings on the affair by Zola and other authors.

² See AMAE (Paris). Espagne Affaires Diverses 34 1894-1895. Série B Carton 20. Documents Secrets. Dossier dated the 3th january 1895.

allowed the spy to finish the portrait of this new enemy of the Third Republic that, as it seems quite clear, was, indeed, a new captain Dreyfus. Nothing more than a Jew, or something that looked quite alike, who admired the Germans, almost a traitor himself, as the son of a Frenchman who had rejected his origins...¹

How much of this was simple anti-dreyfusard hysteria and how much was truth ?

Was Fermín Lasala y Collado, indeed, an infidel Frenchman ?

What did exactly these *émigrés*, who appear in San Sebastián during the “Terror” days, when they became “spaniards” ?

The political career as deputy of Fermín Lasala y Collado in the Spanish Parliament of Madrid, that one which led him, at last, to the Parisian embassy, should explain something about that supposed treason “à la Dreyfus” to their native motherland.

II. From the shadows to the queen’s lap. The political career of the Lasalas

Doubtless the Lasalas decided to cross the border and leave back their French descent. When exactly ? Putting aside spy rumours the Church records say that in September of the year of the French, 1794, when the revolutionary troops invaded the province of Gipuzkoa, just as many other European territories, a Lasala, named Juan José, was born in San Sebastián. He was the son of a Juan Santiago Lasala born in Toulouse and of a María Barbara de Urbieto, neighbour of Oiartzun, a little village not far from San Sebastián recently occupied by the revolutionary Army².

If we follow reading that document we will learn that this marriage was quite successful : in July of the year 1796 a new son, Agapito Manuel Lasala, was baptized. A third son, Fermín Antonio, was born and baptized two years after³.

¹ See AMAE (Paris). Espagne Affaires Diverses 34 1894-1895. Série B Carton 20. Documents Secrets. Dossier dated the 3th january 1895.

² See Archivo Diocesano de San Sebastián (hereafter ADSS). Parroquia de Santa María del Coro (matríz). Bautismos renovados, microfilm n° 39, fol. 68 recto.

³ See ADSS. Parroquia de Santa María del Coro (matríz). Bautismos renovados, microfilm n° 39, fol. 83 verso.

That was the simple truth about how Fermín Lasala y Urbieta, the father of Fermín Lasala y Collado, the deputy, the Spanish ambassador in Paris, arrived to Spain.

As we can see it was something quite different to the story told by the French spy in the year 1895. Nevertheless the dedicated *fonctionnaire* was not completely wrong. It is truth that, in a sense, Juan Santiago Lasala, neighbour of Toulouse, a newcomer to the occupied territories of Gipuzkoa, had the shape of that traitor described in his *rapport*. Indeed, the documents tell us that the grandfather of Fermín Lasala y Collado lived an ambiguous political life.

As it seems he was not one of these *émigrés* that have crossed in thousands the Spanish borders escaping from the revolutionary claws, seeking a safe shelter before the day by day increasingly indiscriminate Jacobin terror. That kind of people fled before the bayonets of the blue soldiers, joined to the terrified human tide of guipuzcoan refugees who tried to avoid that Jacobin monster, partly created by Borbonic propaganda, in the rearguard of the last line of defence organized by the Spanish Army and Basque militia in the area around the village of Eibar¹.

Then, as he rest in the occupied Gipuzkoa, Juan Santiago must be, necessarily, part of the revolutionary Army, or, at least, he kept excellent relations with the blue soldiers and specially with their officers and commissaries. Nobody disturbed him during the invasion and the following occupation. That is quite clear in these Church

¹ About the invasión of Gipuzkoa by the revolutionary Army, see José María Mutiloa Poza, *La Crisis de Guipúzcoa*, CAP, San Sebastián, 1978 and Joseba Goñi Galarraga, "La revolución francesa en el País Vasco" in Various Authors, *Historia del Pueblo Vasco*, Erein, San Sebastián, 1979, p. 5-69, third vol. On the guipuzcoan refugees who escaped before the revolutionary troops we have an interesting example in the village of Lezo, not far from one of the main targets of the revolutionary Army : the port of Pasajes. See Carlos Rilova Jericó, *Askatasunaren arbola. Lezo Historia Garaikidean (1793-1876)-El árbol de la Libertad. Lezo en la Historia Contemporánea (1793-1876)*, Lezoko Unibertsitateko Udala-Aranzadi Zientzi Elkarte, 2005, p. 20. See also José Ramón Cruz Mundet (ed.), *Konbentzioko Gerra Gipuzkoan (1793-1795) : I. V. de Sarastiren eskuizkribua-La Guerra de la Convención en Gipuzkoa (1793-1795) : el manuscrito de I. V. de Sarasti*, Koldo Mitxelena kulturunea-Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa. San Sebastián, 1993. Fermín Lasala y Collado wrote an interesting essay on that war, but he did not said nothing about his grandfather's ups and downs during that invasion. See Fermín Lasala y Collado, *La Separación de Guipúzcoa y la Paz de Basilea*. Establecimiento Tipográfico de Fortanet, Madrid, 1895.

records which show, still nowadays, that Juan Santiago Lasala have enough time and tranquillity to engender a new son, Agapito Manuel, born in July of the year 1796. That is, more or less nine months after the revolutionary Army evacuated Gipuzkoa, obeying the orders of the French government that has signed a Peace treaty with the Spanish King.

The baptism of that new son show us also that Juan Santiago has survived to a new political crisis. Indeed, the restored Spanish authorities, that came back from their trenches in Eibar and Ermua, were seeking revenge against any collaborationist. The traitors or, at least, the supposed-to-be-traitors, fearing the King's Justice and other reprisals, of course, fled from the province following the flags and the cause of that revolutionary Army they have supported, but Juan Santiago Lasala, that French who was not exactly an *émigré*, that have rested in San Sebastián peacefully unmolested during the occupation, was not among them. And again, once more time, nobody disturbed him¹.

As it seems the grandfather of Fermín Lasala y Collado was a clever man. Enough cunning to survive to that age of revolution and brisk change of fortunes. His son and grandson, no doubt, inherited that practical quality.

The son, Fermín Antonio Lasala y Urbietta, the supposed Jew, became a prosperous merchant in San Sebastián spending only a little amount of time. Too little in fact if we consider that the young Fermín Antonio was only 21 years old when he bought in 1819 the half part of

¹ On the guipuzcoan collaborationists see Joseba Goñi Galárraga, "Imagen política del País Vasco en algunos documentos de la Guerra de la Convención", in Various Authors, *Historia del País Vasco. Siglo XVIII*, Universidad de Deusto, Bilbao, 1985, p. 283-286, Lucienne Domergue, "Propaganda y contrapropaganda en España durante la revolución francesa" in Jean-René Aymes (ed.), *España y la revolución francesa*, Crítica, Barcelona, 1989, p. 132-142 and Susana Serrano Abad, "Echave Asu y Romero, José Fernando", in Joseba Agirrezkuenaga Zigorraga-Susana Serrano Abad-José Ramón Urquijo Goitia-Mikel Urquijo Goitia, *Diccionario de parlamentarios de Vasconia (1808-1876)*, Eusko Legebiltzarra-Parlamento Vasco, Vitoria-Gasteiz, 1993, p. 305-308, where it is depicted the biography of one of the most renowned guipuzcoan collaborationists. In fact the head of those traitors who want to create an independent republic protected by the revolutionary Army. On details about the province after the war see Juan Carlos Mora Afán-David Zapirain Karrika, "Gerra eta krisia : 1795, Gipuzkoa Basileako Bakearen ondoan-Guerra y Crisis : 1795, Gipuzkoa tras la Paz de Basilea", in Various Authors, *Azterketa historikoak-Estudios históricos IV*, Zumalakarregi Museoa-Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa, San Sebastián, 1997, p. 47-95.

the new pelota court erected in the neighbourhood of Saint Martin, not far from San Sebastián. There he owned also a public billiard table and a little vegetable garden. As it seems that business was quite successful despite Fermín Antonio sold the whole lot five years after by the half part of its value, when a new French invasion -now it was the Duc de Angouleme's Army, sent by Louis XVIII to help his cousin Ferdinand VII against the Spanish liberals- destroyed the building in the year 1823¹.

Indeed, three years after, in 1827, the young business man have still enough money to join himself, as a partner, to a merchant company : "Viuda de Collado e hijos" (this is : "Widow of Collado and sons"). It was one of the most prosperous business in the city of San Sebastián. They get a huge fortune trading with colonial goods - mainly Cuban tobacco- from the end of the XVIIIth century, when Manuel Collado Regato founded the company².

That was only the first step. Fermín Antonio needed only a year to marry Rita Collado, the daughter of Cayetana Parada, the head of "Viuda de Collado e hijos". The matriarch and her sons did not agreed, but that obstacle was too little for Fermín Antonio, worthy son, indeed, of a natural born survivor as Juan Santiago Lasala. Was Rita who, in fact, decided to marry Fermín Antonio, even defying the anger of her mother and brothers. In her own words, if the marriage should not be celebrated she "would be unhappy" . Besides that she thought that Fermín Antonio was a good catch. At least Rita confessed him that she must "look" after her interest and no other single among the eligible could satisfy these wants³.

Rita Collado was completely right. During the next twenty-four years, until 1853, Fermín Antonio satisfied any want she has. Allied with his brothers-in-law, Fermín Antonio became a millionaire. He multiplied his money almost magically. The third decade of that nineteenth century saw his rise. As a businessman he bought a huge

¹ See Archivo Histórico de Protocolos de Gipuzkoa en Oñati (hereafter AHPGO) P 3 75, folio 75 recto. On Fermín Lasala y Urbieta's life see also Mikel Urquijo Goitia, "Lasala y Urbieta Fermín", in Agirrezkuenaga Zigorraga-Serrano Abad-Urquijo Goitia-Urquijo Goitia, p. 533-534.

² See AHPGO P 3 100, folio 3 recto. On Collado family business see Susana Serrano Abad, "Collado Parada, José Manuel", in Agirrezkuenaga Zigorraga-Serrano Abad-Urquijo Goitia-Urquijo Goitia, *Diccionario de parlamentarios de Vasconia (1808-1876)*, p. 272-277.

³ See Archivo General de Gipuzkoa-Gipuzkoako Agiritegi Orokorra (hereafter AGG-GAO) DM 21, 12, letters dated the 28th and 30th November 1828.

part of the Saint Sebastian buildings reconstructed after the great fire of 1813, and so hundreds of tenants payed him thousands of *reales* each month. Railways -the first one that worked in New York state for instance-, mines, boats -like the brig *Rapido* (“Fast”) -, flour and iron factories, made him one of the most wealthy among the wealthiest in San Sebastián¹.

These successful business became a golden ladder that Fermín Antonio used to climb higher upon the Spanish social pyramid. Indeed, while he was piling up his fortune, he decided, following once more time the opinion of his brothers-in-law, that a businessman needed to control not only the economic milieu where he developed his activities but the political.

Soon he began a devoted quest to find social origins enough good to get his aim. It was the year 1829 when his father Juan Santiago was conveniently hidden in a dark corner of his genealogy. Now his most ancient ancestors were Antoine Lassalle and his wife Marie-Anne Combez. A couple married in Albens, province of Low-Navarre, during the year 1752. Both members of the local nobility as it was pointed in the baptism certificate of their first son. There Antoine was described as “noble” and his wife as “dame”².

In Spain Fermín Antonio found a better kinship, even. One genealogist certified in the year 1829 that he was grandgrandson of

¹ See, for instance, on real-estate capitals AGG-GAO DM 18, 15, accounts dated from 1st july to 31th December 1853. On merchant boats AHPGO P 3 24, contract dated the 30th September 1831 and AGG-GAO DM 40, 4, balance sheet dated the 30th june 1861. On mining AGG-GAO DM 35, 2, letters dated the 22th june 1852, the 29th july 1852 and the 10th august 1852. On railways AGG-GAO DM 35, 28, letters dated the 14th September 1841 and the 13th july 1855. See also Carlos Rilova Jericó, “New York Uptown gangs, railroad tycoons and California gold miners. The basque hands that built America (1814-1851)” (I). Euskonews & media , n° 250, 2003, (*online magazine*). On flour and iron factories AGG-GAO DM 26, 2, invoice dated the 5th august 1853 and AGG-GAO DM 29, 15. See also M. A. Saez Garcia, *Alava en la siderurgia moderna española. San Pedro de Araya (1847-1935)*, Diputación Foral de Alava, Vitoria-Gasteiz, 1999.

² See AGG-GAO DM 6, 6. Not far from Albens there were families called Lasalle related to the highest french nobility. For instance François-Joseph Lasalle, marquis de Roquefort de Sarraziet, born in the same year 1752 when Antoine and Marie were married and designated deputy in 1789 to defend the interests of the local nobility before the constituent assembly. See Adolphe Robert-Edgar Bourloton-Gaston Cougny (eds.), *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, Slatkine reprints, Genève, 2000, p. 611, vol III and Edna Hindie Lemay (et al.), *Dictionnaire des Constituants 1789-1791*, Universitas, Paris, 1991, p. 540-541, vol. II. Anyway Fermín Antonio has no claims on that kinship.

famous captain Joanes de Urbietta, the man who took prisoner of war king Francis the first, sovereign of the whole France, during the battle of Pavia¹.

That was enough to open him the doors of a political career in Spain. This same year he was elected commoners deputy in the municipal government of San Sebastián. In 1831, he was designated alderman of that local corporation. There he, as other liberals, expected, more or less ambushed, a better opportunity. When the tyrant that tolerated them, king Ferdinand VII, will die. That sinister stalking obtained its reward in the year 1833. When the life of the last absolutist monarch of Spain was reaped by age and illness, but not before the sovereign decided to leave the throne in the hands of his daughter Elizabeth, rejecting the supposed rights to that high seat of his brother, the relentlessly reactionary Carlos María Isidro².

The open war between the supporters of young queen Elizabeth and the followers of the reactionary prince allowed new opportunities to Fermín Lasala y Urbietta to move up.

Indeed, the new authorities that began to rule Spain smile on him. Soon in 1842, after that war won by the Liberal party, he became one of the two mayors of San Sebastián. Three years after, in 1845, the young queen favoured him with a title of honorary secretary. In 1847 he and his brother-in-law José Manuel were designated members of the National Agriculture and Commerce Council that ruled the economic life of Spain. One year before he became MP to represent the interests of San Sebastián in Madrid. A seat that he kept until his death in 1853...³

¹ See AGG-GAO DM 6, 6.

² See AGG-GAO DM 6, 1 and Archivo Municipal de San Sebastián (hereafter AMSS) A 03 01 H 00322 L, fols. 1 recto and A 03 01 H 00323 L, fol. 8 verso. On the ambiguous, sometimes tense, survival of liberals like Fermín Lasala y Urbietta or his brother-in-law, Pablo Collado, amidst the political circles after the defeat of the constitutional government in the year 1823 by absolutist forces supported by duc de Angouleme's Army see José Múgica, *Carlistas, moderados y progresistas. Claudio Antón de Luzuriaga*, RSBAP, San Sebastián, 1950, p. 37-67. It's described accurately how the city and their inhabitants faced that new era of revolution and war between Reactionarism and Liberalism. See also Felix Llanos Aramburu, "El Trienio Liberal en Guipúzcoa", RSBAP, Año 36, cuaderno 1-4, p. 161-162. This work contains the member list of the Patriotic Society called "La Balandra", home of the most *enragé* liberals of San Sebastián. Among them Fermín Lasala y Urbietta.

³ AMSS A 03 01 H 00334 L. See also AGG-GAO DM 6, 6, certificate dated the 30th October 1830. On the political career of Fermín Lasala y Urbietta inside the San Sebastián government see Celia Aparicio Pérez, *Poder municipal, economía y*

Again the Lasalas have survived. Fermín Antonio, following the example of his cunning father, had left aside his origins and name - something quite clear in his new genealogy, where he claims proudly be descendant of captain Joanes de Urbietta, the man who captured a defeated king of France ; also he had resisted, despite his liberal ideas ten years of absolutist government, collaborating with these oppressive authorities, even cheering and applauding the defeat of his most decided co-religionists, in 1830, when they tried to took the revolutionary flame that burned Paris, the throne of Charles X and the whole France, back to Spain¹.

Then, money and political influence are well secured in his hands around the year 1847. The road to a bright future it is open for Fermín Lasala y Collado, his only surviving child, born during the year 1832².

III. The making of an Spanish ruler. How Fermín Lasala y Collado became deputy, minister and ambassador ?

Fermín Lasala y Urbietta did not broke completely the ties who fastened him to his French genealogy despite his proud, almost impudent, exhibition of his second family name as a key to climb up the Spanish social pyramid, claiming to descend from that captain Joanes de Urbietta who defeated and took prisoner a king of France.

Indeed, Fermín junior and his mother were sent to Bayonne during the war against the reactionaries which lasted from 1833 to 1839 and finished after the defeat of the absolutist party led by Carlos María Isidro. There the youngster was educated in the finest schools of the city, including the so called Institution Saint León. As it seems it was a deliberate attempt to cast his mind in a French pattern. The war was over in 1839, but Fermín junior and his mother rested in Bayonne until he finished his education in 1843. He spent there three years, from 1840 to 1843, learning in a French school Latin, Mathematics, Rethoric, Religion and Ethics, Geography and History.

sociedad en la ciudad de San Sebastián (1813-1855). Instituto dr. Camino de historia donostiarra, San Sebastián , 1991, p. 125, 148, 274, 310-313, 376-382.

¹ See AMSS A 03 01 H 00322 L, fols. 363 recto-368 recto.

² A sister, María del Carmén, born in Bayonne, during that war exile, die when she was a child. See Archives Municipales de Bayonne (hereafter AMB). Registres de Naissances, année 1839, n° 400. I must thank for that interesting fact dr. Susana Serrano Abad, who warned me about the existence of that second child of Fermín Lasala y Urbietta and Rita Collado.

English, a knowledge quite needful for merchants and businessmen as him and his father, was learned at home, where the French was also spoken, as we can guess reading the correspondence of Rita Collado sent to Olympe Lesseps, her hostess in Bayonne during those years¹.

The plan was successful, the young heir learned the ancestors' culture and tongue. Even more, both mother and father trained him to admire great figures of French History. Rita Collado choose was Mary, queen of Scots and martyr of the *auld alliance* among Caledonians and Frenchs, to stimulate through this way her son's precocious vocation for History. Fermín Antonio preferred Napoleon the first. Some years after, when Fermín junior get his University diploma, he left us a book that testifies, perfectly, until which point he was still a Frenchman. At least culturally spoken. The title of that work was quite clear : "Vicisitudes de la monarquía constitucional en Francia" ("Vicissitudes of the French constitutional monarchy"). There he explained his political points of view, imbedded of French constitutional History, learned reading French authors and documents and hearing attentively to the words of his father, an eyewitness quite interested in the ups and downs of his step motherland government after Napoleon was defeated in 1814².

But, despite Fermín Antonio's heart still rested north of the Pyrenean border, his interests laid south of that boundary, in San Sebastián, in Gipuzkoa, and, specially, in Madrid.

If family business must succeed, Fermín junior must be trained, mainly, to be a Spanish ruler. Doubtless Fermín Antonio, bearing in mind that ideas, decided to take his family with him to Madrid, where he acted at the same time as a businessman and as a MP. Here the young Fermín went to the University, married a gentlewoman,

¹ See Archivo Histórico Nacional (hereafter AHN) Leg. 4311/9, certificate dated 1st July 1848. See also AMB 1 D 22, p. 95-98 and 170, where Bayonne town council describes the kind and situation of the Institution Saint León in the year 1862. An excellent school to educate both bayonnaise children and *lycéens* if monsieur Bart, the principal, should be helped with some money. Fermín Lasala y Collado's education in Bayonne started, at least, in 1837, where he became an awarded student in its *école normale*. See AGG-GAO DM 21, 12, letter dated the 29th july 1837. On these English language lessons see AGG-GAO DM 21, 12, letter dated the 4th October 1842. On his mother's French correspondence AGG-GAO DM 24, 16, letter dated the 3th January 1850.

² See AGG-GAO DM 1, 6, letter dated the 7th august 1851, AGG-GAO DM 21, 12, letter dated the 15th may 1844 and Fermín Lasala y Collado, *Vicisitudes de la monarquía constitucional en Francia*, Fortanet, Madrid, 1878, p. 28-29, 45, 85-87, 95, 158-173, 177, 216, 278 vol I and 63, 133, 411, 466, vol. 2.

Cristina Brunetti y Gayoso, and became friend of a young lawyer and professor of History called Antonio Cánovas del Castillo¹.

Thus, in 1853, when Fermín Antonio Lasala y Urbieta was finally caught by that grim reaper who could not be deluded by his cleverness, his son was on the way to become a brilliant bachelor in Jurisprudence. Three years after his father's death the young Fermín get this title finishing his education at the Central University of Madrid. That one has been reinforced with another diploma of Bachelor in Philosophy by the Literary University of Madrid. When he was 25 years old, in 1857, that was more than enough to get a certificate of election that took him to his father's seat at the Spanish Parliament².

It was only the first time. During the next thirty years, until he was designated senator for life in 1877, he seated in the Parliament of Madrid to protect, sometimes the interests of his hometown or those of the city of Burgos -that was in 1869, after the revolution against queen Elizabeth II- but ever and against all odds to defend his own³.

Indeed, sometimes we can see him protecting the public interest until a strange point, if we consider his origins, position and education. For instance during the Congress' session held in 20th February 1858. This day the Spanish Parliament voted the new Mortgage Law and Fermín Lasala y Collado spoke before that assembly. In first place to compare the Spanish and the French laws. Then, remembering the words of Chateaubriand's "Études historiques" he had read years ago, to advice his colleagues about the unavoidable rise of Socialism if the common people, the workers, were going to be deprived of their rights to own properties. To share the wealth, creating proprietors instead of proletaries, was, in his opinion, the only way to disarm that future revolution of deluded people asking just Justice⁴.

But, despite speeches like that, the interest, both political and economic, of his own business were put before any other one.

¹ On his wedding see Mikel Urquijo Goitia, "Lasala y Collado, Fermín", in Agirrezkuenaga Zigorraga-Serrano Abad-Urquijo Goitia-Urquijo Goitia, p. 527. About the friendship between Canovas and Fermín Lasala y Collado see José Luis Comellas, *Cánovas del Castillo*, Ariel, Barcelona, 1997, p. 23-29.

² On his University diplomas see AHN Leg. 4311 / 9.

³ On his political career as deputy see Urquijo Goitia, "Lasala y Collado, Fermín", in Agirrezkuenaga Zigorraga-Serrano Abad-Urquijo Goitia-Urquijo Goitia, p. 529-530.

⁴ See Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes, 20 de febrero de 1858, número 26, p. 375.

That was exactly what he did when the Madrid Parliament decided about the Spanish railroad that must join France and Spain. His home province was favoured by his discourses and other political actions -for example black propaganda spread out in Madrid newspapers against other companies, guipuzcoan petty investors were favoured too by this parliamentarian and extra-parliamentarian activity, as well as it was a French Company, the “Credit Mobilier”, which get a fine contract to construct a great part of this line, but, doubtless, the main profit went to Fermín Lasala y Collado’s hands because he had invested in that new railroad two million of *reales*¹.

That political way of life get him an increasingly power on Spanish affairs. When the second war against the reactionaries end in 1876, his old friend Canovas, and the king he took to the Spanish throne, rewarded him, as a loyal supporter. As loyal to risk his life on the battlefields, fighting against the carlists, defending as a volunteer a besieged San Sebastián. Enough to be designated minister of Public Works and temporarily of the Interior from 1879 to 1881. Enough too, as it seems, to become Spanish ambassador in Paris two times, arising the suspicions of the antidreyfusard party and defending, as it was logical, the interests of Spain which by this time were, definitively, the interests of Fermín Lasala y Collado².

Conclusion

We must look empathically – even sympathetically – to the anonymous spy that worked so hard in the French embassy at Madrid

¹ See AGG-GAO DM 3, 43, letter dated the 19th January 1862, AGG-GAO DM 2, 26 and AGG-GAO DM 23, 1. On the rival railroads see Carlos Larrinaga Rodríguez, *El ferrocarril del Norte y el paso de los Pirineos a mediados del siglo XIX*, p. 89 and p. 99-118.

² On his career as volunteer during the last carlist war, from 1873 to 1876, see AGG-GAO DM 19, 13, AGG-GAO DM 3, 17, letter dated the 20th June 1885, AMSS E 5 II 2140, 1, letter dated the 23th September 1875 and Francisco Apalategui Igarzabal, *Karlisten eta liberalen gerra kontaerak. Relatos de Guerra de carlistas y liberales*, Auspoa-Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa, Donostia-San Sebastián, 2005 p. 385, vol II. On his career as minister see Archivo del Consejo de Ministros Presidencia (hereafter ACMP) caja 38, legajo 6, expediente 189, minuta 142, ACMP caja 38, legajo 6, expediente 189, minuta 155, Archivo General del Ministerio de Fomento (hereafter AGMF) Expedientes Personales, Fermín Lasala y Collado, leg. 5438, dispatches of Presidencia del Consejo de Ministros dated the 25th October 1880 and the 28th November 1880. On his career as ambassador in Paris see AGG-GAO DM 24, 21, letter dated the 14th July 1890 and AGG-GAO DM 16, 15, letter dated the 26th August 1895.

during the year 1895. He was an awful product of an awful age and, in fact, a poor, naïve, devil who explained the world around him as a “believer” in the political religion of Nationalism. A religion, as many others, that have its saints -perhaps Charles Maurras and Lieutenant Colonel Du Paty de Clam- and its sinners and heretics, as captain Dreyfus or French families who abandoned their motherland looking their own profit south of the border¹.

Which was the political religion, or, at least, the catechism that ruled the actions of people like the Lasalas ?. The shape of that object it is not very clear but I think we can dare to advance some ideas on that matter. As it seems it was a melting pot of local sentimentalism, a loyal and practical Spanish nationalism, international culture -mainly French- and own interest, lots of own interest. The last will and testament of Fermín Lasala y Collado offers an exact image of that way of life. That document was made in 1916, just one year before the grim reaper visit him in one of his houses at Madrid. There an old, childless, Fermín Lasala y Collado said that his really great library -containing 14 000 volumes- and his manor, Cristina-enea, and gardens should be inherited by San Sebastián government. The massive fortune he get from the cunning hands of his clever father, gallantly increased by his own efforts, was destined to fatten the current accounts of the main proprietor of Gipuzkoa, that is : the provincial Government, the so called “Diputación provincial”. Of course Fermín Lasala y Collado explained his reasons to make such decisions : the city council must be one of his heirs because he wanted to give a proper public park – just as good as those that enjoyed the cities of Burgos or Vitoria – to his beloved hometown. The provincial Government should inherit his huge capitals as a token of Fermín Lasala y Collado’s deep esteem to that province and, in fact, to the whole “Vasconia” that did not diminished during the last stage of his political career, dedicated, in his own words, to defend the interests of the whole Spain, his motherland².

¹ “Political religion” it is a concept created by professor Antonio Elorza to explain certain ideologies like nationalism or soviet communism. The idea is partly based upon the theories that french historian Mona Ozouf developed in *La Fête révolutionnaire, 1789-1799*. See, *La Religión política. “El nacionalismo sabiniano” y otros ensayos sobre nacionalismo e integrismo*, Haranburu, San Sebastián, 1995, p. 7-8.

² On this spy’s naivety see AMAE Correspondance consulaire. Saint-Sébastien, tome 6, 1851-1859, rapport dated 6th may 1851, where the French consul in San Sebastián portrayed more exactly who was Fermín Lasala y Urbieta. On Fermín

Was that all ? As it seems somebody have something to add to that last will and testament where Fermín Lasala junior justified his political and social position. Alderman Barriola, member of the Nationalist Basque Party, had his own ideas about the life and facts of Fermín Lasala y Collado, and he explained them before the city government when they knew that the duke was dead, leaving aside the superstitious roman proverb that warned to say nothing wrong about the dead people. There he said that the late duke of Mandas, despite he has been general deputy of one of the last provincial governments which ruled Gipuzkoa before the abolition of the Basque charters in 1876, he did not defended properly the interests of Basque Country. Enough to blame his name and to reject that legacy¹.

Fermín Lasala y Collado himself had admitted that he put his political and economic interests before any other consideration. His last book *Última etapa de la unidad nacional. Los fueros vascongados en 1876 - Last stage of the (spanish) national unity. The basque provincial charters in 1876-* defended in two big volumes why he decided to support the politics of his old friend Antonio Cánovas del Castillo. He elucidated there his love for his home province's privileged constitutions, which he defended gallantly during the constituent parliament of 1876, but, at the same time, he maintained that this was a lost cause. Just as the election of Amedeo of Savoy as the new king of Spain after the revolutionary dethroning of Elizabeth II, just as the first Spanish republic born in 1873 and buried in 1875,

Lasala y Collado's testament see AMSS A 17 III 162, 8, fols. 16 recto-16 verso and 19 verso-20 recto. "Vasconia" are, usually, the seven basque provinces, including the Spanish and French Navarre, the three Basque provinces, Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia and Alava that nowadays are the autonomous community of Euskadi in Spain and Laburdi and Zuberoa, under French rule. This does not mean, of course, that Fermín Lasala y Collado accepted nationalist points of view, as professor Juan Gracia Carcamo has explained the idea of Vasconia was not exclusively nationalist until the twentieth century. See Juan Gracia Carcamo, "Antes y después del nacionalismo. Arístides de Artiñano : una vida consagrada a través de su obra histórico-jurídico-política a la "Santa Causa foral" (1841-1911)" in Virginia Tamayo Salaverria (coord.), *I Symposium : El Derecho Histórico de los territorios de Vasconia : Protagonistas y artífices*, Notitia Vasconiae, nº 1, 2002 , p. 361-409.

¹ Indeed he was general deputy of the guipuzcoan provincial government from 1862 to 1863, see Urquijo Goitia, "Lasala y Collado Fermín", in Agirrezkuenaga Zigorraga-Serrano Abad-Urquijo Goitia-Urquijo Goitia, p. 528. On Barriola's speech see AMSS A 17 III 163, 1, p. 7-8. On Barriola himself and on the Basque Nationalist Party see Mikel Aizpuru Murua, *El Partido Nacionalista Vasco en Guipúzcoa (1893-1923). Orígenes, organización y actividad política*, UPV-EHU, Bilbao, 2000, p. 265 and 357.

just as any other political option that touched his interests. He was not exactly original. As professor Jover Zamora has shown, the main part of the Spanish landowners and the high bourgeoisie decided in 1876 to support the ultraconservative parliamentary system of Canovas' restoration as the only possible. Just as Fermín Lasala junior did it¹.

So complex was the career and the ideas, the mentality if we prefer that controversial analysis term, of a Spanish deputy, minister and ambassador of French descent. Much more than the “philosophy” of any antidreyfusard spy could imagine. This was the kind of men that ruled Spain from their seats in its National Assembly during the century of Parliamentarism. Just another Victorian politician, perhaps better placed, even better educated, but not very far from those *opportunistes* that owned the French government during the Third Republic who dealt at the same time with the affaire Dreyfus, with a certain imaginative, and naïve, spy and, finally, with a really cunning Spanish ambassador of French culture and French descent who walked an interesting path from Albens to Paris passing through Madrid².

¹ See Fermín Lasala y Collado, *Última etapa de la unidad nacional. Los fueros vascongados en 1876*, Real Academia de Ciencias Morales y Políticas, 1924, two volumes. See also Mikel Urquijo Goitia, “Fermín Lasala y Collado : del Fuerismo liberal al conservadurismo canovista (1832-1917)”, in Tamayo Salaverria (coord.) : *I Symposium : El Derecho Histórico de los Territorios de Vasconia : Protagonistas y artífices*, p. 343-359 and Coro Rubio Pobes, “Liberalismo, Fuerismo y Fueros vascos entre 1839 y 1868”, in Coro Rubio Pobes-Santiago De Pablo (coords.), *Los Liberales. Fuerismo y Liberalismo en el País Vasco (1808-1876)*, Fundación Sancho el Sabio, Vitoria-Gasteiz, 2002, p. 152. A work that talks about “a conservative turn” in the political ideas of the Lasalas. On the political options of the Spanish landowners and high bourgeoisie see José María Jover Zamora, *Realidad y mito de la Primera República*, Espasa Calpe, Madrid, 1991.

² On the *opportunistes* see Pierre Miquel, *La Troisième République*, Fayard, 1989, p. 348-349 and Jérôme Grévy, *La République des opportunistes 1870-1885*, Perrin. Mesnil-sur-l’Estrée, 1998.