2 After Franco, Who?

Contrary to what Juan Carlos had hoped, the regime did not immediately modify its treatment of him in the wake of his wedding. On 23 February 1963, after attending the annual requiem mass for Spain's monarchs presided over by Franco at El Escorial, their first public appearance together, Juan Carlos and Sofía were dismayed to discover that state-owned television had failed to mention their presence altogether. General Castañón, who was on good personal terms with Juan Carlos, hastened to inform the minister of information of the prince's disappointment. Manuel Fraga, who had not been noted for his monarchist sympathies in the past, agreed to exert greater control over his subordinates in future, a promise he was not always able to keep. In May, however, Franco invited Juan Carlos to occupy a prominent place during the official funeral for Pope John XXIII.

Franco's already favourable opinion of the young couple was reaffirmed by their move to La Zarzuela. In the spring of 1963 he proudly informed his private secretary that Sofía had made enormous progress with her Spanish, and described her as both clever and charming. He also denied rumours that Juan Carlos was unintelligent and totally under his father's influence, something about which he had seemed less certain in the past, insisting that he was more cultivated and independent than was generally realised. The Caudillo was particularly anxious to prevent the couple from falling under the spell of the idle Madrid aristocracy, thereby distancing themselves from ordinary Spaniards, and urged them to make themselves accessible. The princess needed no prompting in this respect, as she had already decided to dispense with ladies-in-waiting and the like, keeping the entourage at La Zarzuela as small as possible. Indeed on arriving in Spain Sofía had been pleasantly surprised to discover that someone of her rank could lead a relatively normal, anonymous existence.

Juan Carlos remained reluctant to contravene his father's wishes, and continued to hope for a negotiated settlement with Franco that would finally clarify his own position. The christening of his first-born, Elena, held at La Zarzuela in late December 1963, provided him with an ideal excuse to bring them together again, but the Caudillo refused to discuss matters of substance with his arch-rival.

Though clearly fond of Juan Carlos, Franco did not go out of his way to repress the views of those within the regime who resented his presence in Madrid, and even tolerated the proliferation of rival candidates. This was particularly true of Juan Carlos's cousin Alfonso, King Alfonso XIII's
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eldest grandson, who had begun to question his father's right to abdicate on behalf of his successors. In February 1964 Alfonso surprised observers by sitting next to Juan Carlos at the requiem mass in memory of Spain's monarchs, held at El Escorial. Three months later, however, for the first time Juan Carlos appeared at the dictator's side during the annual civil war victory parade. By this stage Franco was privately admitting that, given Don Juan's hostility to the regime, Juan Carlos was the most suitable successor, as long as he adhered to the regime's principles; if he refused, he could always be replaced by Alfonso, who had publicly embraced the Movimiento. The most active champion of Alfonso's cause in government circles was the ubiquitous José Solís, minister-secretary general of the Movimiento since 1957.4

Juan Carlos was never allowed to forget the hostility his presence aroused in some quarters. Much to Franco's irritation, in May 1963 a group of Carlists greeted the royal couple with cries of 'Viva el Rey Javier!' as they left a Madrid theatre; Sofía later regretted not having replied with a loud 'Viva Franco!' Later that year Don Javier's son changed his name to Carlos Hugo prior to announcing his claim to the Spanish throne. The Caudillo, however, was unimpressed. As he told his private secretary, 'for me the bad thing about the Traditionalists is not their doctrine, which is very good, but their determination to bring a foreign king to our country whom no one knows, who has always lived in France, and for whom the Spanish people feel nothing'. Indeed it was Franco himself who subsequently turned down Carlos Hugo's application for Spanish nationality. To complicate matters further for Juan Carlos, in 1964 his deaf-mute uncle Don Jaime declared himself head of the Bourbon dynasty under the influence of his second wife, a German cabaret singer who had helped him to improve his speech.5

The prince was anxious to occupy his time usefully, but knew that Franco would not allow him to pursue his military career. On one occasion, when he requested permission to spend some time with his fellow officers, the dictator curtly retorted: 'Doing what? Going to the bar to play cards?' Unsure as to how to proceed, the prince finally consulted Franco himself, whose sole advice was: 'Let the Spanish people get to know you, Highness'. In view of this, Juan Carlos turned to the minister for public works, General Jorge Vigón, his under-secretary Vicente Mortes, and the ever-solicitous López Rodó, who drew up a plan that was to enable him to obtain first-hand knowledge of key ministries and other state institutions, and to spend time with those who manned them. At the same time Juan Carlos embarked on a systematic tour of Spanish towns and villages.6

By and large, Juan Carlos was extremely well received on his visits,