

THE DIGNITY COMMISSION OR PUBLIC DEMAND

Until this year, demands for the return of Catalan documentation deposited in Salamanca in what is known as the "Civil War Archive", took place exclusively within the political arena, first, in the Parliament of Catalonia and then in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate in Madrid. The path travelled has been very long, starting with an initiative by Antoni Senillosa in 1979 and continuing with the 1995 PSOE government agreement that urged return, although it did not even publish this in the BOE and thus never made it effective. From that time to the present day, other political initiatives have also been made by different Catalan parliamentary groups. They have had the same negative result. The mixed commission of experts (historians in this case) also did little. When this commission failed to reach unanimous agreement, it backed the Archive Board up by considering the controversy closed, in the declarations of the Minister of Culture in July this year.

In this background, Salamanca has been named European Capital of Culture in 2002. The schedule of events includes an exhibition entitled Propaganda in War with the mentioned Archive collection. As everyone knows, this collection is made up of documentation that was selectively plundered by Franco's army from different authorities, associations and individuals, including the Government of Catalonia and other Catalan organisations. This, together with the political stalemate in negotiations for the return of the Catalan documents, led to the formation in January 2002 of a Dignity Commission for the return of the Salamanca Blood Papers, a platform made up of a wide range of civil organisations, which were representative of Catalan society as a whole and included the Association of Archivists of Catalonia. From this moment onwards, the demand changed arena and although it continued on a political level, a claim by the public started to take shape.

On 11 February 2002, the first meeting of the Dignity Commission took place at the *Ateneu Barcelonès*. Different bodies and personalities from the world of culture attended to establish the programme of short-term work to be done. The first initiative consisted in drawing up a *Declaració sobre l'oportunitat, en l'actual context de concòrdia entre els pobles d'Europa, d'afrontar la dignitat dels catalans* (Declaration on the opportunity, in the current context of agreement among the people of Europe, to consider the dignity of the Catalan people). The text serves as a manifesto and after describing situation and origin of the documents plundered during the Civil War, mentioning the recommendations of international bodies on the documents stolen in armed conflicts and quoting previous political initiatives, the Commission demands compliance with the agreement of the Council of Ministers of March 1995. This agreement required the return of the collections to Catalonia and acknowledgement that the collections belonged to their legitimate owners.

The Declaration sought the support of experts of recognised international prestige: five hundred professors from two hundred universities in forty-seven countries subscribed as well as members of the political and human rights world such as Rigoberta Menchú, Noam Chomsky, Joan Oró, Nawal al-Saadawi, and F. Mayor Zaragoza. On 11 June, the Dignity Commission and the Declaration were made public with international support, as part of an academic act in the auditorium of the University of Barcelona that was presided by its rector. Antoni Strubell, promoter, member and co-ordinator of the Commission, requested that the Spanish government acknowledge that the documents belong to Catalonia and should be withdrawn from the exhibition planned for October in Salamanca. The declaration was subsequently presented to the Minister of Culture of the Government of Catalonia and to the Chief Minister.

On 14 October, a delegation made up of individuals, associations and political parties travelled to Salamanca to give a press conference and explain, without any mediators, the reason why the return of the documents was being sought. On this occasion, priority was given to the opinions of the individuals and organisations directly affected by the theft of the documents. On the following day, 15 October, an act of protest was called in Barcelona. This brought together 5,000 people and had two parts to it. One was a more political-type rally before the Civil Government and the other was a leisure-protest act in the *Plaça del Rei*, where Teresa Pàmies, representing the individuals affected, David Jou and the singer Raimon took part. These acts undoubtedly had the greatest popular and media impact. A second journey by the Dignity Commission to Salamanca, on the day of the inauguration of the Propaganda in War exhibition led to interviews with teachers from the University, with councillors and journalists and to the establishment of contacts with the *Ateneo de Salamanca*, a body that includes figures in culture from the city.

The Dignity Commission's work expanded to Valencia, where it was presented on 26 November and where it shares a permanent office with *Acció Cultural* of the Valencia Autonomous Community.

With a view to the future, the Commission intends to intensify its campaign to encourage Catalan councils to subscribe to the Declaration and does not rule out legal action.