

Interview

Spanish state: the movement of the “Indignad@s” and its perspectives

Monday 4 July 2011, by [ANTENTAS Josep Maria](#), [DIVÈS Jean-Philippe](#), [VIVAS Esther](#) (Date first published: 25 June 2011).

Beyond the special characteristics of each country, what has been happening both in the Spanish state and in Greece, after the start of the uprisings in the Arab world, will have consequences throughout the continent. Hence the importance of a thorough analysis of the reality and potential of these large protests. Esther Vivas and Josep Maria Antentas give us their opinion about the meaning of the “Indignad@s” movement.

Jean-Philippe Divès - How would you define the central characteristics of this movement?

Josep Maria Antentas: The movement started completely by surprise. The demonstrations of May 15th (15M) were much larger than expected and the camps arose spontaneously. From the beginning of the crisis, social reaction had been weak. Finally everything exploded in an unexpected, or “unseasonable” way, as Daniel Bensaïd would say. And as nearly always when a large social movement starts, it did so with young people being the protagonists in the initial phase, and with innovative and disruptive forms of protest. It is the most important instance of social radicalism for the last ten years, when the antiglobalization movement started, and now, in the middle of the crisis, the social and territorial depth of the movement keeps growing.

Esther Vivas: The 15M movement’s criticism is twofold. On the one hand, it is aimed at politicians, and on the other, at economic and financial powers, as the motto aptly sums up: “We are not merchandise in the hands of politicians and bankers”. The revolts in the Arab world have been a source of inspiration, as is shown by the occupation of squares and by the camps, which follow the example Tahrir square, among others. These actions have worked as a lever to propel future protests, and they have helped amplify current ones. They played a symbolic role and acted as base camps, not as an end in themselves. The internet and social networks, such as twitter and facebook, have played a key role as a space for discussion, political awareness, and to build an identity and a shared experience, beyond being instrumental to social mobilization.

From the outside, one gets the impression that the breakup with the organized workers’ movement, trade unions and parties, is even more important than in Greece... What happened with the unions after last year’s September 29th general strike?

Esther Vivas: After the general strike on September 29th the majority unions demobilized as usual. The general strike was only a temporary shift and did not mean a change of orientation. In January CCOO and UGT and the government signed an agreement about pension reform, which raised the number of years’ contributions that are needed in order to receive a state pension. This violently

ended any hopes of union mobilization. The majority unions remain puzzled by a movement they never expected and which questions them. Now it remains to be seen what their reaction will be and whether the movement will be strong enough to force some kind of change on their part. On many camps, such as the one in Barcelona, a general strike was clearly called for, and the will was also shown to “take indignation to the workplace”, where there is still a lot of fear and resignation.

Josep Maria Antentas: The movement expresses a total rejection of Zapatero’s government policies. Izquierda Unida have shown sympathy with the protests, but in general they have remained well on the outside, without a real militant commitment. The left outside parliament and some alternative unions have been present in the movement, together with a large variety of non-organized people and social collectives. Struggling sectors, such as health workers in Catalunya, who had mobilized against the cuts, have also played an active and visible role.

As mobilization develops, is there progress in the demands and the level of awareness?

Esther Vivas: The protest day on June 19th (19J) showed how the movement was moving towards the left and had deepened its demands. Some of the most often recurring slogans in many demonstrations were against the Euro Pact, against social expenditure cuts and against banks, and also for a general strike. A radicalized atmosphere can be perceived, although in a vague and diffuse manner, in shouts like “revolution begins here”, chanted on many of the camps. Another key moment in political radicalization was June 15th, when in Barcelona there was an attempt to block the Parliament of Catalunya during the parliamentary debate on the Catalan government’s budget, where the most important social cuts in the history of democracy were put forward.

Josep Maria Antentas: From the start the movement has passed various tests, which have allowed it to mature and to deepen its discourse, for example the victory against the attempted removal of protesters in Barcelona on May 27th, or the criminalization undergone after the blocking of the Parliament of Catalunya on June 15th. Denouncing the use of the budget deficit as an excuse to cut rights has been a part of the movement’s policy. In the case of Catalunya, for example, the rejection of the Catalan government’s budget, which includes severe cuts on health and education, has been a key aspect of the movement.

In your opinion, what will remain of this movement? Is there a chance that more permanent ways of structuring it will survive?

Esther Vivas: Since the first camps and the occupations of squares in big cities, their example has spread to medium and small cities and towns, as well as suburban areas around big cities. Coordinated assemblies in towns and neighbourhoods have also been set up. And these are, in fact, one of the movement’s main organizational achievements. We are expecting a heated autumn with new protests, like the one on October 15th, and with specific struggles against social expenditure cuts.

Josep Maria Antentas: This is not a temporary movement, but the tip of the iceberg of a predictable new wave of protests. 15M and the camps have been the first blast and have acted as a springboard. In the last few weeks the movement has spread, diversified in terms of class and age, and it has taken root geographically. The success of the 19J demonstrations showed this clearly. In less than a month there has been great growth in quantity and quality.

What is the impact on the Spanish state’s political scenario? Does the movement involve or can it cause important changes?

Josep Maria Antentas: The movement that arose from 15M has had a strong impact on public opinion

and it has been very prominent in the media. No one expected the huge success of 15M, and even less what followed. These few weeks have changed the political and social landscape of the whole of the Spanish state. They are a token of the rejection of Zapatero's government policies, and also a very clear warning to the right, which aspires to win the next general election, that they are going to meet a panorama of social unrest once they rise to power.

Esther Vivas: These protests mean, without a doubt, a turning point and the start of a new stage. Many people have said that "nothing will stay the same", and so it is. The movement has finally ended the resigned passivity and the despondency that ruled until now. The present has opened up a window of hope for the future.

P.S.

* Interview by Jean-Philippe Divès for the French newspaper Tout est à Nous, june 2011.

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