

Artur Scissorhands, or the regression of political and social rights in Catalonia

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“The government of the best.” That is how Artur Mas described his cabinet immediately after he came to power at the beginning of his term of office, which ends today. And it’s true, “the government of the best” arrived in the Generalitat (the name of the Catalan Government), but it is the government that is “the best with a pair of scissors”.

Since his election victory in Catalonia, two years ago, there have been cuts in health, education, all sorts of social benefits... budget cuts that had already started with the previous tripartite government and which have increased today. We have regressed in terms of social, economic and democratic rights, and they have sold the country to the highest bidder. They have left us in the hands of thieving bankers and politicians who criticize the “culture of ‘No’” and protest, while they themselves are addicted to the “culture of ‘Yes’” to everything that capital says. The failure of the Eurovegas [1] circus and the banana-republic style bowing down before a character as shady as Sheldon Adelson (an American billionaire) have been the best examples. [2]

These policies have led us to a situation of collective bankruptcy, where today one in five people in Catalonia live below the poverty line, where a million and a half people, according to the Food Bank, suffer from nutritional deficiencies and where every day there are more than 100 evictions. Arthur Mas has proven to be the best student of Angela Merkel, the Troika and the “men in black”. For the first time in Spain, people now have to pay a part of the costs of medical treatment, and it is in Spain that we have seen the largest increase in university fees, an increase of 67 per cent compared to last year.

In two years, more than 50 clinics and emergency services have been closed, the construction of five new hospitals has been stopped, and the number of people on the waiting list has increased by 43 per cent, taking us back to the figures of 2003. The privatization of public health, through the introduction of precarious employment and outsourcing of services, is a reality. This is a fantastic deal for the bosses of the Catalan health system of which Boi Ruiz was the president before assuming his current post of Advisor on Health. What a coincidence... or not.

Sticking your nose into affairs, such as those in the health sector, where public and private interests are intermingled and in which the transparency of public accounts is not really clear, is not without risk, as demonstrated by the investigations conducted by the magazine Cafeamblllet whose revelations cost it no less than a €10,000 fine.

They have also made cuts in education: a reduction of the budget of 14 per cent, 3,500 fewer teachers, six schools closed, new school building stopped, still more than thousand classrooms in temporary constructions, a 50 per cent drop in investment in child care and fewer subsidies, and delays in payment for the catering service.

Similarly, poverty has been criminalized and stigmatized. In August and September 2011, the Government did not pay any money to thousands of families who receive the minimum income (RMI) from the state. His argument: it was necessary to review every file in order to combat the “abuses”

of certain beneficiaries. Benefits were suspended for 7,000 people who were not affected by the announced fraud, as demonstrated by the fact that many of them have been authorized to continue receiving the benefit.

None of the electoral promises of CiU (Convergence and Union, the party of Artur Mas) have been kept. Except one: to abolish inheritance tax on the highest incomes. This measure had already begun to be implemented by the tripartite government, which lowered this tax so that only the wealthiest paid it, and CiU has totally abolished it. As a result, the government is losing €150 million, while massive cuts are being made.

But the cuts are not confined to social rights. They are also reducing democratic rights. The “Puig doctrine” has imposed preventive detention, the persecution and criminalization of community activists, trade unionists, students, etc. and the creation of an Internet page where people can denounce demonstrators, something which has echoes of the McCarthyist attitudes of the 1950s. Since the last general strike on March 29, more than 100 people have been arrested for the mere fact of having taken part in picketing. According to the “Puig doctrine”, to be young, unemployed, a victim of eviction, an immigrant, a trade unionist, a student, a feminist and to fight for your rights, is synonymous with delinquency, and therefore you are likely to be arrested, ordered to pay a fine and charged. Less of a Welfare State rhymes with more of a penal and punitive state.

Today the campaign begins in Catalonia, and there is every indication that Artur Mas will win again - the only president who will not pay for the consequences of the crisis and the spending cuts. His magic formula: to use the legitimate sovereign aspirations of the Catalan people to develop policies which have already led us to poverty, unemployment and precarious employment. Artur Mas presents himself to us as the “Saviour” of Catalonia, while in fact he has led us to the precipice. We want to decide our future, but we also want a future and a country without cuts.

The scissorhands are back, but this is no longer Tim Burton’s innocent Edward Scissorhands, who cut and modeled beautiful figures. It is his gorier version that we see today in Catalonia, without having to pay at the box office. It is the version of Artur scissorhands, who wherever he goes, leaves a trail of misery and desolation, as he cuts everywhere, absolutely everywhere, except where the rich and their privileges are concerned.

Esther Vivas, November 23, 2012

P.S.

* Translation International Viewpoint. <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/>

Footnotes

[1] A project to build a giant casino in Madrid, in the style of Las Vegas

[2] For more information on this: Courrier International “Eurovegas ne touchera pas le jackpot”.