

Spanish State: The European nightmare, Podemos and creative outbursts

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Contents

- [A plurality of actors](#)
- [Creative outbursts](#)

The debate has opened up in Podemos around the need for a candidacy of popular unity and for a break with neoliberalism, in the perspective of the coming general election – which will perhaps be earlier than planned [1]. This election will take place against the background of the Greek crisis and a European scene that is marked by extreme tension. Without a doubt, its outcome, one way or another, also depends on whether the expectations of “change”, not only in Greece but also in the Spanish state and the eurozone, increase or diminish. To raise the conflict to a higher level – at least in regard to the Southern countries – is fundamental in order to have a guarantee of a successful outcome, even if it is only partial and temporary.

Therefore, our first duty at present is to organize solidarity with the Greek people, who are confronted by the humiliation that Merkel and company intend to impose. This is essential if we want to impose a way out of the situation that is anti-austerity and democratic, faced with the oligarchic despotism that, with its rejection the call for a referendum, wants to install itself permanently in Europe.

In the case of the Spanish state, things are also very clear as regards: the recent “recommendations” of the International Monetary Fund (facilitation of lay-offs and “wage adjustments”, increase in VAT, participation in the cost of health care and education ...); the cuts that have been announced by the government of Mariano Rajoy for future budgets (let us remember that public spending in this country continues to be 5 per cent below the average for the European Union); and the threats that Finance Minister Cristobal Montoro has already addressed to the new governments of the autonomous communities and municipalities following the elections of May 24, if they do not fulfill the conditions of the restrictive laws on “balanced budgets”, in line with Article 135 [2] of the Constitution and with the Fiscal Compact of the eurozone.

Meanwhile, we still have a large number of empty houses and despite the “economic recovery” and statistical manipulation, the unemployment rate has hardly diminished, while precarious work and wage differentials among workers themselves have increased.

Added to all this, to highlight only some of the most severe measures, there are new attacks against civil liberties: such as the Public Security Act [3]; the reform of the Penal Code starting from July 1; and the likely approval by Parliament, starting on July 16, of the new agreement with the United States for the Morón base [4]. This has turned out to be a real “hidden gem” – in the words of a pro-governmental electronic journal – of the military deployment of the Pentagon, which is developing in a more and more aggressive way its “new” world geopolitics (especially in Africa), which implies greater internal insecurity. It is no coincidence that Rajoy, with the complicity of the PSOE, is conducting these discussions with the greatest possible discretion.

As always, the imperial “iron hand” accompanies the “velvet glove” of the new “commercial” treaties to dominate the world, such as the treaty being negotiated between the United States and the European Union, known by its initials TTIP or TAFTA [5], which, fortunately, is beginning to emerge from the secrecy in which they wished to maintain it. It is beginning to be challenged in key countries such as Germany. It is a treaty which, if passed, would moreover confirm the blindness of turbo-face capitalism in the face of climate change, which has finally been denounced by Pope Francis and which was recalled in the second international ecosocialist conference that was recently held in Madrid.

So there are good reasons for us to be in the forefront of the growing disaffection with this “democracy” and with the European Union (EU), as recognized in the recent report of the Alternativas Foundation and also the European Social Survey. It is therefore not surprising that the events commemorating the 30th anniversary of entry into “Europe” have gone unnoticed. Because this “Europe”, which did not even manage to unite to welcome the tens of thousands of people fleeing famine and war, has definitely gone from being the “dream” to becoming a permanent nightmare.

A plurality of actors

Therefore, the desire for popular unity cannot be separated from the horizon of a break from neoliberalism that gave birth to Podemos, and this obliges us not to limit ourselves to proposing government programmes which abandon this objective or which attempt to restrict criticisms of the “1978 régime”, as appears from the statements of some of its leaders. Democracy against the debtocracy, protection of social rights and common goods, popular sovereignty and a constituent process (also, therefore, a process that is proper to Catalonia) on the road to another Europe and another civilizing project; these continue to be key ideas that are capable of uniting an indignant social majority, although, perhaps, the rhythms of the construction of a new hegemony are not as rapid as we would like.

In parallel with this option for a “change” that is not simply a “spare part” for the dominant bipartisanship [PSOE-PP] - and following on the historic change that we experienced in the municipal elections and, although in a more limited way, the regional ones - the idea that seems to be shared increasingly is that of an enlargement of the bloc of social and political sectors who want to “storm the institutions” in order to “win” and to lay the foundations of a new politics, in both its content and its forms.

This plurality of actors has been recognized by the leaders of Podemos, more on the political than the social level, in Catalonia, Valencia, the Balearic Isles and Galicia, but we are still far from that situation in other regions. Because it is certain that on the level of the state we cannot imagine other forces than Podemos as the main reference for the constitution of lists of candidates, but it is also true that there are many people who have not identified with this formation and who, at other levels - those of the community or the province - want to participate in the building of a campaign, both programmatically and in terms of electoral lists.

Added to this is the fact that Podemos is no longer the brand new formation it was in January 2014: it has already travelled a path marked by notable successes - as in the European elections [6] - but also by bitterness caused by the choice of a classic party model, centralized, with processes of bureaucratization and a fear of internal debates; a formation that is too centred on a leadership which, according to a widespread opinion, has lost the “freshness” of its beginnings and which is showing itself to be increasingly deaf to what is happening outside its offices and the circle of those

who are closest to it. We cannot therefore be surprised at the significant decline in its participation in social networks over recent months, not to mention the number of local branches that have lost the enthusiasm with which they started out.

Creative outbursts

So it would be well to remember, along with Tomás R. Villasante, that “the leaders of the human networks are there because they know how to listen to all kinds of rumours, and when they lose the ability to be in contact with the people in the street they eventually become isolated and others appear in their place. This is why considerable powers are accorded to the “spies” or sociologists, informants or any type of daily information on the direction taken by the processes.” [7] In this case, we could say that the leadership of Podemos runs the risk of living in a “schizophrenia” that resists recognizing that what was approved at Vistalegre, [8] though even then already questionable, is being applied; but we were then in a period different from what has existed since May 24, with the pressure for popular unity. The manifestos and articles that seek to sketch out another path are but a pale reflection of what seems to be happening at rank-and-file level, and not just among activists. Overcoming this tension between the old and the new phase does not necessitate making a “clean sweep” of the successes that have been obtained, but it really is necessary to reformulate the “winning” project.

To think that it is possible to respond to this new reality by simply looking for leaders in civil society, in social movements, in the judiciary or in... business [9], or even in parties like Izquierda Unida, in order to co-opt them onto a list headed by Pablo Iglesias, would be a mistake. It is clear that we need leaders that people can relate to and identify with, for the building of a collective will for change. But it is also clear that without political pluralism and without candidacies that are rooted in their localities, it will not be possible to ensure that the battle for hegemony and a “new common sense” are reflected in self-organization and in social and popular power. Those are the only guarantees of transforming into victories what is won on the institutional level, as we are already seeing with the way the new municipal authorities are being harassed. To achieve all that, we will have to look for more open and participatory forms within Podemos, but also other forms that are turned towards the exterior without patriotism of the “brand” (or logo) and without arrogance. Still, one of the key tests to know to what extent the leadership of Podemos has seen and has been capable or not of “reading” what took place in many towns and villages during the recent election campaign lies in what Diego Pacheco mentioned in a recent article [10]: the existence of an enriching pluralism inside and outside of Podemos will not be recognized with the system of primaries with “closed lists” (which has been employed up to now) and with moreover, apparently, a single constituency, according to what the Citizen Council proposed last Saturday, June 27 [11]. If this were indeed the case, we would be facing a huge obstacle to making Podemos the main driving force for change in the coming months.

Because with this “model”, the leadership of Podemos will show not only the fear that it has of pluralism within its own ranks, but also an inability to converge with what exists outside of itself, in order to build a project of superior quality, in the best sense of the term, as happened in some towns and cities during the municipal elections. A project that goes beyond us in a creative way, generating this “enthusiasm” that is produced at times of collective effervescence.

If this proposal was adopted, there would be still more of a contrast with what is being achieved in regions such as Catalonia, for example, (with the emergence of a possible Catalunya en Comú [12] and what could happen elsewhere.

Let us remember that the debate that preceded the emergence of Podemos revolved around the

need for a “political-electoral tool” capable of getting past the institutional deadlock and making viable a project of a break with neoliberalism. The challenge now is to see whether Podemos passes the test and continues to be an adequate tool or whether, on the contrary, in the name of a “transversality”, misunderstood and starting from above, its leadership becomes autonomous to the point where, as has already happened many times in history, it generates its own interests in a logic of electoral competition that could result in a “passive revolution”, but not the “democratic revolution” which began on May 24.

To sum up, let us not be afraid of “creative outbursts,” of ourselves being overtaken by better tools, which we can relate to and identify with, without giving up anyone’s identity and, in this way, not adding to but multiplying the forces that are ready and willing to “win.”

Finally, let us not forget our responsibility, even greater today, to join forces with the Greek people for the confrontation that has finally opened up with the dominant interests of the euro zone.

Jaime Pastor, June 29, 2015

P.S.

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* Translation IVP. <http://internationalviewpoint.org/>

Footnotes

[1] The general election is scheduled for November 2015

[2] This article was adopted quickly in August 2011, while the PSOE was in power, thanks to an agreement with the PP. This is one of only two changes to the Constitution since 1978; it makes payment of the debt a constitutional priority. See the interview in two parts with Gerardo Pisarello published on the website A l’Encontre: <http://alencontre.org/europe/quand-le-pouvoir-des-creanciers-dicte-les-normes-constitutionnelles-.htm>

[3] Known as the “muzzle law”, it severely restricts civil liberties and the right to demonstrate.

[4] This is one of the four bases ceded to the US by Franco in 1953.

[5] Transatlantic Free Trade Agreement for Trade and Investment

[6] In the European elections on 25 May 2014 Podemos, with nearly 8 per cent of the votes, had five MEPs elected.

[7] Tomas R. Villasante, *Redes de vida desbordantes*, Madrid, Catarata, 2014, p. 183.

[8] The Founding Conference of Podemos as a structured organization, held in Madrid in October 2014. It saw the adoption of the principles of closed lists and of centralism around the core

leadership of Pablo Iglesias (who threatened to resign if he was not elected).

[9] As Pablo Iglesias said at a press conference on June 27.

[10] Diego Pacheco, "Invitación al Debordo": <http://www.vientosur.info/spip.php?article10218>

[11] A general primary will be organized and, depending on the results, candidates will choose in which of the 52 constituencies they will stand. "Spaces" may be left free to allow the inclusion of "personalities" (Pablo Iglesias recently conducted an interview with Baltazar Garzon and wants to include magistrates, businessmen and forces other than Podemos in different regions. In addition to this being a centralized and undemocratic measure, the aim is to exercise strict control over any process of converging forces similar to those that led to lists for the municipal elections, often outside Podemos (Madrid, and Barcelona, for example) or in the elections for the autonomous communities (Valencia, Galicia, etc.).

[12] Following the example of the list Barcelona en Comú that enabled Ada Colau to become mayor of the city. See Marti Caussa, ESSF (article), "[art: 35069](#)