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Spanish state

The United Left...Divided

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The Eighth (Extraordinary) Federal Assembly of the United Left (IU) took place in Madrid on 10 December 2004. This assembly had been convoked following the bad results obtained in the European elections, in order to examine the causes of these results and also to discuss alternative propositions to re-launch the organisation. In fact, the proceedings of this assembly revealed a considerably divided organisation and the leadership team of Gaspar Llamazares was strongly challenged.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/iucm-2.jpg>]

Even though the official political document received 60.6 per cent of votes, with 26.6 against and 12.9 per cent abstaining, the support obtained by the alternative document (27.8 for, 55.4 against and 16.9 per cent abstaining) defended by 21 members of the Federal Political Council (belonging to the Left Platform, the Critical Current of Andalusia and Espacio Alternativo) showed that a fairly strong left opposition existed.

The discussion on the nature of the new political cycle, on the strategy and tactics to adopt in relation to the new government and on the type of political education was at the centre of the debates in most of the federations, and that allowed our document (whose title was "Theses for an IU that is anti-capitalist, alternative, federalist, democratic and pluralist") to win majority support in several of them.

But the division was most clearly shown after the results obtained by the three lists who stood for election of half of the members of the Federal Political Council (the other half is to be elected by the different federations of IU in the course of January 2005).

The list headed by the outgoing General Coordinator, Gaspar Llamazares, got 49.52 per cent of the votes and 54 members; the list headed by Enrique Santiago (ex-leader of the Communist Youth, supported by a section of youth but also by the leadership of the PCE and leaders of the majority sector in Andalusia, 38.1 per cent and 42 members; and finally, the one headed by Sebastian Martin Recio (mayor, elected with an absolute majority, of the town of Carmona near Seville) 12.38 per cent and 14 members. This last list was made up of members of the Critical Current of Andalusia, the Unitary Workers' Collective (CUT, linked to an agricultural workers union with a real presence in Andalusia) of Espacio Alternativo and of part of the Left Platform.

Even though these two last two lists had disagreements with each other, they came together in criticising the leadership methods of the Llamazares team and in demanding the formation of a pluralist leadership, especially so after the results of this assembly).

But faced with the possibility of a convergence of these two lists for the election of the General Coordinator, the Llamazares sector got the assembly to adopt, by a slim majority, an amendment stipulating that the General Coordinators of the federations had the right to take part in the first round of this election (the second round will take place on January 22 in the presence of the other half of the members elected by the federations).

The decision to apply this amendment immediately (since the Llamazares sector had a majority among the Coordinators) gave rise to a tense debate, which led to Enrique Santiago putting off presenting his candidature to the January session, and finally Llamazares was re-elected. But the lack of legitimacy of this "solution" had a pretty negative effect, not only on many militants but on the social and electoral milieu of IU.

It remains to be seen if, with either Llamazares or Santiago as General Coordinator, we will be able to establish a leadership that, while respecting the resolutions adopted in this assembly and the proportion obtained by each list, will not reproduce a dynamic of confrontation and will be able to help recompose the whole organisation, and above all regain credibility for it in order to conquer, along with the social movement, an alternative and autonomous space to the left of the PSOE.

We also have to mention the adoption by the assembly of an amendment defended by Espacio Alternativo which obliges leadership bodies to hold an internal referendum each time there is a question of an electoral or governmental alliance with other political forces.

That is quite important, given that at present we are starting to see the development of more and more critical positions in relation to participation in governments like that of the PNV in the Basque country, or the presence of allies of Iniciativa per Catalunya in the Socialist Party government in that Autonomous Community.

A very uncertain future

If the diagnosis on the present state of IU is easy to make - a very deep crisis of common political project and identity, and especially a tendency towards the disappearance of internal political life, replaced by the life of different sectors and political "families" - the therapy to treat the wounds, which have deepened over the last period, is hard to find.

The Llamazares sector has a relatively clear idea of its project - to be a political force that complements the PSOE in government and to build a party that gives priority to institutional and media activity.

In the sector that Enrique Santiago represents there are potential differences over how to understand the autonomy that that IU has to have in relation to the PSOE (the discourse on the "party of struggle and of government" continues to be dominant), on relations with the social movement and on the model of political organisation to be developed (renewal or not of leaderships, role of the PCE in relation to IU...)

As far as the list that Espacio Alternativo took part in is concerned, the differences are rather with the CUT, which tends to deny the changes that have taken place in the political situation after the defeat of the Popular Party (PP) of Aznar and the arrival in government of the PSOE, even though there is a strong convergence on the necessity to link the social question and the national question in a radical anti-capitalist and democratic perspective.

The most important problem lies precisely in the fact that there is not yet a new cycle of political and social struggles (apart from the case of the civil shipyards of the Izar public company, which are threatened with being privatised under the pressure of the European Commission, and the permanent debate on the national question; the Basque conflict, the reform of the Catalan statute and the recognition of the plurinational reality of the Spanish state).

The Right and the Catholic Church practise a tactic of confrontation that facilitates the control of the forces of the Left by the Zapatero government. During the debates on the budgets for 2005, the Zapatero government was hailed by the employers for its continuity with the economic and social policy of the last period and for its adaptation to the criteria of the EU's Stability Pact. The left forces, on the contrary, shone by their silence.

The campaign for a "No" vote in the February 20 referendum on the European Constitution could enable IU to rediscover an internal unity and appear as proposing an alternative discourse and propositions to those of the PSOE.

But neither its internal situation, nor the little interest shown by its present leadership in organising this campaign give much hope of that happening.

To that we have to add the boycott by the majority of the media and the refusal of the governing party to debate with the supporters of the "No" vot. Among these are Esquerra Republicana, Eusko Alkartasuna, le Bloque Nacionalista Galego, Batasuna and rank and file sectors of the bourgeois nationalist forces in Catalonia ad the Basque Country, as well as the CGT (a union of anarcho-syndicalist origin), the Basque unions ELA and LAB, the critical sector of the Workers' Commissions (CCOO), Ecologistas en Accion (the most important ecologist organisation), Attac and others.

Jaime Pastor, member of Espacio Alternativo, was re-elected as a member of the Federal Political Council of IU at the Eighth Federal Assembly.