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Spanish state

# Breaking with bad politics

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**The implosion of Podemos in the Community and the City of Madrid has been a surprise in terms of the time chosen, but for any minimally informed observer it was implicit in the situation. Currently the most naive or malicious opponents are pretending to be shocked by the shameful crisis of the Madrid left, but if we do a quick review of some political events of recent years, we will see that not everything that happened is an “aberration” or a “disgrace”, but the logical and inevitable consequence of a whole trajectory. Neither is it a psychodrama in which two friends are fighting, or just a bureaucratic dispute that is emaciated by power, though obviously it is also that. It is the end of a cycle for the transformational politics of this country.**

We will choose three causes that, in my opinion, have given rise this situation and, if we are able to understand them, they will give us clues to start on a new path with new perspectives and on new bases. [1]

First, Podemos itself. Podemos is not a party: it has failed as a partisan project, in the historical sense of the term. Parties, in their modern sense, are groups that “represent” classes or organized class fractions, with roots in civil society and grouping their support around a programme or long-term political objectives. Podemos does not have the project of a different society, because, presumably, people can only imagine society as it is today. Podemos does not have an organized social base because, apparently, to storm heaven you did not need to have your feet on the ground.

Podemos, more than a party, is a drifting apparatus, which oscillates in a disoriented fashion between what could have been and what really is: a despotic regime in which the absence of pluralism means differences are resolved on the basis of intrigues, manoeuvres and disloyalty. Pluralism, the assumption that emancipatory traditions cannot be reduced to one, is an irreducible reality: it is the only way to articulate the unity we desire.

Secondly, collective agreements have been ignored again and again for the sake of the whims and the particular opinions of the “leaders”. The case of Manuela Carmena (Mayor of Madrid) is perhaps the most flagrant. A collaborative, participatory programme, with a lot of intelligence behind it, was dismissed by the mayor as a list of “suggestions”. The incredible thing was the submissive acceptance of this by the Podemos bureaucracy in any of its versions: the “Carmena brand” was more important than the mobilizing impulse that had allowed the City Council to win.

But there are more examples: Ramón Espinar won the primaries in an agreement with Anticapitalistas, which included a “unitary” and transformative road map that, a few months after the triumph, was abandoned without explanation, an operation that culminated with the “parachuting” of Errejón as a candidate for the Community of Madrid. Or Pablo Iglesias winning Vistalegre II with a speech against the PSOE, and then adopting the strategy designed by his rival Errejón. “Más Madrid” is the latest movement of a politics based on the caprices and blackmails of leaders, public faces, general secretaries: as was, on the other hand, the “fingerprint” of Pablo Iglesias imposing Errejón as a candidate.

Third, Podemos's deep transformational turn inevitably had to generate a parting of the ways. Manuela Carmena and Álex Errejón represent the most consistent sector of that section of the left that seeks integration into the regime, accepting the traditional division of the latter's politics (progressive restoration / conservative reaction), and which opts for abandoning any constituent perspective. That is, accepting the current political-economic framework as the only one possible and renouncing the formulation of a political strategy in other terms.

Unfortunately, the hegemony of the public relations rhetoric of “majorities” has provoked a deep regression in popular aspirations, accepting an increasingly narrow framework that is only functional for the particular interests of a new political class.

The basic problem is that all the manoeuvres and bureaucratic drifts respond to one mission: getting rid of the real ties that linked the new policy to 15M (assemblies, consensus, radical reformist programme), turning it into something similar to what the 1st of May means for the big union bureaucracies: an event which has no practical meaning. [2] Both the manoeuvres of Errejón and the whole political-organizational line of the state-level leadership of Podemos are the last attempts to get rid of the remains of those ties.

Errejón’s movement undoubtedly has a political background: it is about radicalizing this turn towards the centre-left and of gaining full autonomy not only against the leadership of Podemos (with which, by the way, they fundamentally agree politically), but also IU and other sectors further to the left. A manoeuvre similar to what Manuela Carmena did when she liquidated Ahora Madrid, launching her Más Madrid project and breaking with the sectors grouped in Ganemos (IU, Anticapitalistas, or municipal sectors now grouped around La Bancada).

Now comes the fundamental question: what to do faced with this parting of the ways? In my opinion, the fundamental debate is not about the future of the left: it is about whether we accept that the monopoly of institutional policy is in the hands of a neo-progressive centre-left or if we try to maintain in Madrid (and in the medium term, at the state-wide level), a wedge with a constituent, challenging and struggling programme that allows us to face in better circumstances a new period characterized by a normalization of the multiple crises of Hispanic capitalism, the radicalization of the privileged classes moving towards the extreme right and the end of the mobilizing “offensive” dynamic that we have felt in recent years.

Obviously, I think we must go unambiguously for this option, provided that this recomposition is not led by the same people that have led us to disaster. The Podemos leadership has failed miserably when it comes to setting up a project in Madrid, lacks a broad, dynamic and articulated militant base, and has behaved with terrible arrogance towards the other sectors, combined with political opportunism. Their trajectory and the results of their disastrous and erratic political line make them incapable of leading anything and we must finish once and for all with the idea that they have that role: that is an illusion based on their role in the previous political stage. Any hypothesis led by this faction is bound to fail.

The embryo of new candidacies in the CAM, in Madrid City Council and in many towns of the Community is in the experience of the six “critical” councillors of Ahora Madrid. IU, Anticapitalistas and La Bancada have the activist network and organizational capacity to promote candidacies that are the embryo of a new space opposed to the resignation, cynicism, verticalism and political normalization combined with social misery to which these times seem to lead.

There are programmatic agreements that make this possible, including on how to proceed, especially around pluralistic and cooperative organizational methods, such as open and proportional primaries. Also, on the need to incorporate as an active factor working people, linked to neighbourhoods, movements and struggles, outside the small militant elites. Podemos could join them, but not imposing their rules: the times of domination by the sword have already passed.

We must be sensitive to the concerns of many people around the current situation. The concern for unity is understandable. Although the lessons are painful, a parting of the ways in which we can improve the left’s options is not necessarily bad news: we can collect more votes and, at the same time, normalize the fact that there are different projects to deal with the situation. It is about continuing but learning the lessons: not to delegate or relinquish command capacity either to a bureaucracy or to a leader, even if it promises to take heaven by storm. Let’s make it

possible for assemblies, activism and transforming programmes to return. It is the best guarantee to avoid decomposition in these dark times.

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[1] The leading figure of Podemos in Madrid has broken with Podemos to form an alliance with the incumbent mayor. See *The Nation* 7 February 2019 "[Is Spain's Left-Wing Party Podemos Cracking Up?](#)".

[2] 15M - 15 May 2011, the outbreak of the Indignad@s movement which contributed to creating the conditions for the emergence of Podemos.