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Spanish State

The enormous potential of Podemos

- IV Online magazine - 2014 - IV478 - November 2014 -

Publication date: Sunday 9 November 2014

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Since the summer, dozens of documents, written by Podemos activists, individually or in a more collective manner, are circulating and being discussed throughout the hundreds of "circles" that bring together rank-and-file activists from across the Spanish state and beyond its borders, for example in Belgium. What is at stake is nothing less than deciding collectively what constitutes the political project of Podemos.

Neal Michiels

Last weekend, all these documents were presented in assemblies in Madrid on the occasion of the "citizens' assembly" of Podemos, presented as the founding assembly of a new political party, with no less than 8,000 people present. From October 20 to 26, members vote by Internet for the adoption of three texts: political, organizational and ethical. Then it will be a question of choosing the members of the Citizens' Council, the leading body of Podemos. The candidates will campaign again for a week before an election by Internet. I will not write here a detailed report of the two intensive days of the Citizens' Assembly, but rather give an overview of the political, organizational and ethical project of Podemos that is under discussion, as well as of the potential of this formation to govern and to take power in the Spanish state. We will see that at this level the organizational question is decisive.

The political project

Let us start by mentioning the resolutions that were put to the vote this weekend alongside the political, organizational and ethical documents. The five subjects that had the most support on Internet and that were adopted at the assembly by the members of Podemos covered education, health, housing, the fight against corruption and an audit of the debt. These are themes that are a good reflection of the general agreement with the political line established by the team of Pablo Iglesias, which emphasizes opposition to austerity and the reconquest of "common sense" by the population. Because they correspond to glaring social reality, these demands should be able to mobilize a large part of the electorate in the Spanish state, much broader than the activists and sympathizers who already identify with the Left. But there is a populist approach which puts to one side more controversial issues such as the autonomy of the communities [\[1\]](#) and which generates multiple problems with its patriotic accent, the defence of "medium-sized enterprises", etc. We will not address these problems here because the discussions over the weekend were more than dominated by organizational issues.

The organizational structure

The most important discussion was scheduled for Sunday morning. It was the culmination of intense discussions, widely publicized in the media, of the documents "Claro que Podemos" of the Iglesias team and "Sumando Podemos" bringing together proposals from several origins, whose most well-known figures are the MEPs Pablo Enchenique, Teresa Rodriguez and Lola Sanchez. The importance of the organizational document demonstrates the profound aspiration of a significant number of activists in the local circles of Podemos: before you can develop and defend a political project, you need democratic structures within the organization.

The project of the Iglesias team, with a general secretary and the limitation of the power of the circles, made people angry and generated a very broad resistance. This team, through the voice of Monedero, tried to present any

contestation calling for more democracy as an injurious attack orchestrated by Izquierda Anticapitalista, Spanish section of the Fourth International, which had been at the origin of this project along with several independent personalities. On Sunday morning, Iglesias's team had to accept and recognize that the contestation was much broader than expected, extending to roughly half of the 8,000 participants in the hall and, more importantly, to the majority of the most active circles.

For lack of time, many alternative proposals could not be combined. Thus, alongside the document "Sumando Podemos", already bringing together several proposals, there were dozens of other alternative documents. When Teresa Rodriguez and Pablo Enchenique went to the podium to defend their document, they said that they could be brief: "everything has already been said" by other groups. Indeed, the majority of alternative documents and the majority of circles also defend more power for the circles, a more democratic and permanent constitutional process, local and intermediate structures between the circles and the leadership and a plural leadership with a team of spokespersons rather than one general secretary.

The choice is between a presidential and plebiscitary structure and a model of *empoderamiento* (empowerment) of people. The organizational model and the political discourse of Iglesias could perhaps win elections by mobilizing votes and getting supporters to stick up posters. But while the "efficiency" brandished by Iglesias as an argument to defend his proposals stops at the formation of a government, the alternative documents "Sumando Podemos" (organizational) and "Construyendo Pueblo" (political) raised the fact that the taking of power is not limited to governing.

For Rodriguez, self-organization and "people power" are fundamental for taking power: "For us, winning the elections and taking forward the process of citizens' self-organization are part of the same process. We will need to mobilize citizens to win elections and we will need it when we win elections, in order to govern. Can anyone doubt that the markets will put us under pressure when we win the elections, that the caste will be opposed to the loss of its privileges? ". So the document that is being relegated by Iglesias into the corner of the "dreamers" claims to be not only more democratic but also more effective, if the goal is to take power and change society.

The atomized vote by Internet in which a lot more people than the activists in the circles will participate this week, will no doubt be overwhelmingly in favour of the Iglesias line, thanks to his popularity. Especially since he had indicated that if his proposal was not accepted, he would no longer take on any responsibilities. But nevertheless the citizens' assembly demonstrated powerfully that the majority of activists will not settle for a centralized and plebiscitary structure. The statement of "Claro que Podemos" that it was the "most democratic organizational proposal in Spanish history" is hardly convincing. A broad current for more democracy has been born through this process of establishing a new political force.

The ethical document

The "ethics document" was the least important of the three documents. There had still been time enough for a certain unification of the organizational and political proposals, but this had not proved possible for the ethical document. The ethical document of "Claro que Podemos", however, is not innocent. The presentation - very demagogic, in the manner of a public meeting - by Monedero on Saturday morning did not forget to mention the most important aspect: the prohibition of "double membership". "Out of Podemos, out of our ranks!" This slogan was not only directed at potential opportunists coming from the traditional parties to join a political party with the wind in its sails. It was also aimed at the activists of Izquierda Anticapitalista. With the adoption of this ethical document, the activists of this formation, who were committed from the beginning to building Podemos, would be excluded automatically from posts of responsibility in the new party. The "Claro que Podemos" team accepts only one organized tendency: its own.

The enormous potential of Podemos

In conclusion, the potential for Podemos is enormous. The mobilizations of the *indignados* (15M), the movements for defending public education ("Marea verde") and health ("Marea blanca") and against evictions, the "marches for dignity" in every corner of the Spanish state and the struggle for the right to abortion have found a political expression in the new Podemos party. It is a political project that is capable of mobilizing a majority of the population. But the organizational form that the project is likely to take after this week's vote is an enormous contradiction, contrary even to the spirit of 15M. However, for a broad current from the circles, the constitutional assembly is not over and the struggle for a democratic and "people power" project continues. This is the condition for being able to discuss politics and breaking with capitalism. *SÍ, se puede!* ("Yes we can!")

October 24, 2014, Madrid

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[1] In the Spanish state, apart from the many regions, there are three "autonomous communities": Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country (Euskadi), where there are distinct nationalities (or nations, depending on one's point of view). They have more extensive powers - not the same in each of the three cases - than do the regions.