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Spanish State

The “crisis” of Podemos

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Nobody should expect a settlement of accounts or internal gossip on Podemos in this article. We believe that what is rather required is quite the contrary: to calm down, regroup, discuss, explain and prepare. The people, the strength of the bloc for change, look at what is called the “crisis of Podemos” with amazement, without understanding what has happened. Have Iñigo and Pablo clashed? [1] Is there disagreement in Podemos? It is not enough to answer that it is an invention of the press when it was served up to them on a plate. We must make the effort to discuss and try to understand in order to advance. It is necessary to abandon the intellectual laziness of tiffs on Twitter or pontifications on Facebook.

At this time of accelerated rhythms, the legitimacies like the certainties are more volatile and are more numerous than ever. The “Prince” of the twenty-first century, the organized party, must live in a creative tension with the movement, with this overall intellect, plural, dispersed and changing. In addition, it is more important than ever to count on a leading group, firm on its principles, but always at the service of popular classes.

What is called the “crisis of Podemos” can only be explained in these terms. A party which has more than five million voters, but which is very weak in its rank and file organization. A plural party without pluralism. A party where democratic debate has tended too often to give way to the politics of rumours. A party where there is talk of “families”, “clans”, instead of “positions” and “currents”. A party which is not yet a “prince” because it has not been able to generate a creative tension with the movement, but rather a tension which has not been very constructive and, sometimes, even destructive. A young and vibrant party which falls sick every month. A party filled with agreements and disagreements.

There has of course consensus on many of the basic questions: the need to finish with the old parties, the urgency of transcending the cultural constraints and the politics of the old left, the need to be a tool for a lot of people and not for a few. There is agreement on other matters which should not be fundamental, but who have their importance, such as the recognition of the ability of Pablo Iglesias as a popular leader, who many, beyond the differences, consider as a leader of great intellectual value, able to connect as a person with the people. And, as at the time of Marx, when everybody claimed to be Hegelian, some of the right and others of the left, we all claim to be Gramscians, even if some are “right Gramscians” and other “left Gramscians”.

But there is no agreement on many other issues. There has not been agreement on the creation of democratic rank and file structures which function and form a counterweight, to be the basic structures from which the leaderships originate. On the contrary, what has been chosen is a plebiscitary model, where there are no debates, a model of consensus, where we could only ratify. There was no agreement to build a party-movement which, rather than to soliciting unconditional memberships, re-appropriates all the rich heritage of the forms of action which emerged with the movement of 15M. What has been chosen is an election war machine. There is no agreement to renounce the major programmatic orientations of rupture and constituent processes, to renounce the democratization of the economy by the socialization of the financial structures and strategic production, or again to renounce radical measures in the face of the crisis and the attacks on wages or the basic income. We were not in agreement that the program be watered down, in a Keynesian framework that places the axis of exit from the crisis in palliative measures to be taken by a future government, instead of relying in this confrontation on class and popular self-organization. There have been a lot of differences, we always think what we think and nothing happened. We defend our positions openly and we are trying to convince people that they are the best to ensure change.

But as Podemos is a party of paradoxes, the model which prevailed, curiously, turned against those who designed it. The dismissal of Sergio Pascual was made in accordance with the statutes and respecting the party model of party

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adopted at Vistalegre. [2] Pablo Iglesias has used his powers as Secretary General to dismiss one of the main persons responsible for the implementation of the model of Vistalegre, based on a vertical and authoritarian structure, on the famous political re-centring, and on a plebiscitary populist model which was copied in too many aspects from the Communist parties of the 20th century, but without their roots in living social forces. The deputies who resigned from the Citizen’s Council of the autonomous region of Madrid and Sergio Pascual himself belonged to the sector which had conceived, defended and implemented Vistalegre.

This has happened, whether by chance or not, at a time when Pablo Iglesias is deepening the idea of building a differentiated, non-subordinate popular camp antagonistic to the elites and their representation, recalling that of Anguita [3], becoming the target where the bullets of the regime are focused. We find ourselves, let us say it in the words of Gramsci, before a case of “progressive Caesarism”: “Caesarism is progressive when its intervention helps the progressive force to triumph, albeit with its victory tempered by certain compromises and limitations”. In other words, Pablo Iglesias seems to be moving (curiously, advancing and retreating) toward “fresher” positions which recall this Podemos of struggle and of government, whose meetings gave one goose bumps, but it is done within the framework that has produced Vistalegre, a framework of limitations, bureaucratic traps and shortcomings.

What matters now is to go forward in two respects. Tactically, it is incumbent upon us to avoid new irresponsible actions, which feed the idea of a crisis, while we should be in the process of preparing ourselves, by debate and unity in plurality, to face the two options which are emerging: either a grand coalition, or new elections.

Strategically, what has happened these past few days should lead to a great reflection on the party-movement which the popular classes need. And for this it is not enough to have an opinion, it is necessary to rely on the support of concrete examples. For the Citizen’s Council of the autonomous region of Madrid a new stage has opened. It must open everywhere in Podemos. This must be the point of departure: to again address all those people who have been at a given time in a base circle and have not remained, even if they voted for Podemos. To extend the hand of friendship to activists, to social movements, trade unionists, while respecting their autonomy, so that they know that Podemos is their party. We must be the only thing that we can be to win: plural, democratic, radical without falling into identity politics. There is no crisis: there is a world, there, outside, that we must conquer.

[1] Pablo Iglesias has removed Sergio Pascual, organisational secretary of Podemos and a friend of Álvaro Errejón, from his functions, while a group of Podemos deputies on the Citizen’s Council of the autonomous region of Madrid have resigned

[2] The founding congress of Podemos was held at Vistalegre in October 2014.

[3] The former general secretary of the Communist Party and former general coordinator of Izquierda Unida