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Spanish state

# On global turmoil, the regime crisis and Podemos

- IV Online magazine - 2017 - IV506 - March 2017 -

Publication date: Thursday 9 March 2017

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**This comment on the general situation and after the Podemos Congress “Vistalegre 2” was written for the magazine [Viento Sur](#) and published on 21 February.**

1. Since 2007-2008 there has been a growing consensus, both among those who challenge this system and by a growing number of scientists, including think tanks linked to the establishment, around the diagnosis that we are facing the biggest crisis in the history of capitalism. The same can be said of the fact that the constant search for an outcome through a new neoliberal turn of the screw only increases all the inequalities and aggravates a climate crisis that threatens the future of life on the planet.

That the same global crisis will lead to the end of the old order of "happy globalization", to the crisis of hegemony of Western neoliberalism, to an accelerated restriction of democracy and a geo-economic, geopolitical and geo-cultural transition that is full of uncertainties - where the presence of "monsters" looks more likely than revolutions - is also a shared evidence. It is doubtless within American society that these processes are concentrated - as is the attention of the world - insofar as, with the victory of Donald Trump, a powerful "movement of movements" is beginning to develop: we can hope that it will succeed in outflanking the "neoliberal progressives" and breaking the present authoritarian and racist turn. [1]

The subtitle of the report presented at the recent Security Conference (18-19 February) in Munich is no doubt a good example of the perplexity of the elites faced with the historical moment in which we are living: post-truth, post-West, post-order? During this conference, we also witnessed the staging of the first meeting between Donald Trump's spokespersons (Vice President Mike Pence, Defence Secretary James Mattis and Homeland Security Minister John Kelly) and the leaders of a European Union (EU) that is adrift, fearful that the new US president will demand greater involvement in the military effort by the European pillar of NATO, as well as greater involvement in Syria in conjunction with Russia and the regime of Bashar al-Assad in the name of the common struggle against the Islamic State.

On the other hand, there was no call for hospitality for the millions of refugees fleeing the wars and conflicts to which the Western powers are not foreign. Fortunately, the recent demonstration in Barcelona, under the slogan *Casa Nostra, Casa Vostra!* ("Our house is your house!") represented a good reply to the moral degeneration of the European project, and it is to be hoped that it will be only the beginning of a cycle of mobilizations on a continental scale.

We can also refer to the report of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence of the United States entitled "Global Trends: The Paradox of Progress". This report has already been commented on by Michael Roberts. [2] It warned about the repetition of "shocks such as the Arab Spring, the global financial crisis of 2008 as well as the global rise of anti-system populist policies". Faced with such a panorama, which sanctions the failure of the "creative chaos" embarked on since September 11, 2001, we can perceive an attempt at reorientation on the part of the greatest world power: "it would be tempting to put this apparent chaos in order, but ultimately it would be too expensive in the short term and would be a failure in the long run."

Thus, it seems that the crisis of geostrategic over-expansion following the disasters of Iraq and Afghanistan is now being replaced by a more selective attitude towards direct US military interventionism, an attitude compatible with the determination to maintain NATO and its military bases in different parts of the world, in particular in Rota and Morón (two of the four American bases installed on Spanish soil following the 1953 agreements between the United States and the Franco dictatorship).

Other "self-critical" reports and commentaries, such as that of the former US Treasury Secretary (between 1995 and 1999) Lawrence Summers, or that of the American Enterprise Institute, point to a sombre perspective of "secular stagnation". [3] We can see in these documents the *de facto* recognition that we are far from a new phase of economic growth and, what is worse, an announcement that we are probably heading for a new global systemic crisis, of which the only unknown remains the moment of its appearance.

It is not surprising, therefore, that we are seeing new calls concerning the role that international financial institutions should play in the reactivation of "global governance". These institutions, however, are more concerned with imposing new austerity policies whose sole result is to add new names to the list of "failed" and "fragile" states.

This general picture is particularly serious in the European Union and the euro zone, insofar as the dictatorship of debt - Greece being obliged to carry out new attacks on pensions – the misnamed "refugee crisis" and now the threat of a Frexit in the wake of the Brexit are leading to the crisis and even to the decomposition of parties "of the system", as is the case with the Republicans and the Socialist Party in France and the Democratic Party in Italy.

It is not surprising, therefore, that what is most feared by the elites in the short term is the outcome of the successive elections that are being held in key countries (Netherlands, France, Germany...) insofar as they could lead to the constitution of government by forces qualified as "anti-system", although unfortunately the majority of them combine a xenophobic and Islamophobic discourse with the rejection of the establishment. [4]

2. In such a global and European context, the panorama in which we find ourselves in the Spanish state is, of course, not tinged with the optimism that is cynically portrayed by Mariano Rajoy.

While it is true that, thanks to the PSOE's abstention, the leader of the People's Party (PP) was able to form a government again, it continues to accompany its so-called "economic recovery" with new social cuts demanded by the Troika, as well as measures such as the reactivation of nuclear power stations like Garoña.

Moreover, the shadow of the widespread fraud during the financial-property bubble has come back to the forefront with the trial of senior officials of the Bank of Spain - including those of the "Socialist" period - for their connivance at the time of the listing of Bankia on the Stock Exchange. At the same time we are seeing ongoing trials and convictions for the corruption scandals affecting Rajoy's party (currently the president of the region of Murcia is on trial). Furthermore, the royal family is involved: Cristina de Bourbon, the sister of the king, was acquitted on 17 February, but her husband, Inaki Urdangarin, was sentenced to six years and three months in prison for embezzling subsidies worth millions. These are examples that, once again, indicate that it is not just a question of rotten apples, but of structural corruption affecting the entire regime.

It is true that the electoral threshold of the PP has proved to be difficult to reach, but it is also true that it remains insufficient not only to ensure governability but also to provide sufficient guarantees for the stability of the regime. The collaboration of the PSOE in this dual task is essential, since the limits reached by Operation Ciudadanos (C's) have been observed.

The debate on the budget will be the main test to see whether or not the ruling elite of this party is committed or not to maintaining the "triple alliance" (PP-PSOE-C's) while the PSOE is faced with an internal electoral calendar whose outcome is uncertain (especially the primaries that will elect the new general secretary). The party is faced with a situation where in addition to the factors of crisis that affect European social democracy - the socio-liberal cycle running out of steam, the increasing erosion and aging of its traditional electoral base – it is faced with the specific dimensions of the electoral capacity of Podemos and the conflict between Catalonia and the Spanish state.

The recent resurgence of Pedro Sánchez (dismissed after an internal "coup" to permit the formation of a PP government), with his perspective of a "new social democracy", implies a full-scale challenge against a Managing Committee (the temporary structure of the leadership of the party) at the orders of Susana DÃ-az, president of the Junta of Andalusia, "boss" of one of the most important sections of the PSOE and organizer of the internal coup.

The future will show to what extent, despite its limited credibility and the weakness of its self-criticism of the past, the innovative proposals of Sanchez's programme - the redistribution of wage labour, the universal allowance and the plurinational character of the state - are capable of generating the enthusiasm of an activist base that is disconcerted by the suicidal path taken so far by the party. In any case, the internal bipolarization may well become a crescendo over the coming months and, with it, the aggressiveness towards this "leftism" of the elites - inside and outside the party - who have already demonstrated their power with the brutal dismissal of Sánchez. We might even find ourselves confronted with a conflict of legitimacy between the outcome of the primaries and what will be adopted in Congress, whose members are more easily under the control of the apparatus of the Managing Committee.

The decline of bipartisanship (PP-PSOE) remains therefore a dominant trend, all the more so in that the party that is most affected is a PSOE without prospects of electoral recovery and which, unlike in the past, will have to ally with Podemos to be able to provide an alternative government to the PP. That is one thing that Sánchez has understood.

Nor is it possible to limit the Bankia case (Bankia is the result of the merger of seven distressed regional mortgage funds and then its listing on the Stock Exchange) to a simple case of corruption: far more than that is at stake, insofar as it is one of the clearest manifestations of the unleashed capitalism that has developed over the years in the context of the implementation of the euro system and the "wealth effect" that it has created.

There is therefore no reason to consider that the crisis of the regime is over, not even the crisis of governability, something which is even more true in the midst of the turbulence of the euro zone, whose future is uncertain. It is a crisis of the constitutionally proclaimed social and democratic state of law, but also and especially of the state of the Autonomous Communities.

Although the holding of a referendum in Catalonia, in which a majority of Catalan society participates, will be very difficult as long as there is no legal or international recognition of it, it is also true that the refusal to authorize its holding will continue to engender growing disaffection towards the Spanish state, including its monarchical institution, as evidenced by the growing adherence to the aspiration for a republic within this community.

The recent attempts at "dialogue" are not only late: they are already no longer able to bring about fractures within the party which historically has been the support to state bipartisanship in Catalonia.

**3.** Following on the Citizens' Assembly of Vistalegre 2 (10-12 February), the responsibility of Podemos in this new phase, irrespective of what the augurs say, remains decisive. It should be recognized, however, that both during the process of preparation and during assembly itself, the participation of the majority of activists in the preparation of the documents was weak. Similarly, the debate on the points of convergence and divergence between the different positions has not been clarified. That is a deficit whose resolution does not appear to be possible with the organizational model that was approved, because, despite the pretension to go beyond the model of the "electoral war machine", the traits of the concentration of power and a plebiscitary democracy whose negative effects have been sufficiently verified during the three years of the existence of this party, still persist.

Furthermore, there is something more worrying: despite the new leadership's desire to transform itself into a popular movement that creates the impulse for social counter-powers, it seems that this aspiration is subordinated to the construction of a "Podemos to govern"..., with a programme that would limit itself to demanding a return to the

neo-Keynesian "social contract" that existed prior to the systemic crisis, ignoring both its past limitations and the impossibility for it to exist in this new historical stage.

This absence of an alternative narrative that goes beyond the old social imagination - which would involve coming into conflict with the present debtocracy, but also with the fetish of economic growth and with the dominant pattern of consumption, in order to put the sustainability of human existence at the centre of things - is more patent because of the fear of drawing the lessons of the Greek experience, as was pointed out by Podemos En Movimiento (one of the three main currents of Podemos, the one that has the least influence within its leading bodies, in which Anticapitalistas plays a key role). To take up such a debate now and to invite similar forces in Europe, as proposed by a manifesto which has recently been made public, is a fundamental point in order to approach this new phase. [5]

Without this, we run the risk of a hasty closure of the "non-debate" of Vistalegre by means of a recomposition of the coalition between the two major factions (Iglesias and Errejón) around a project focused on the formation of a government which would once again relegate the circles of Podemos to the simple role of pre-electoral campaign committees. This hypothesis should not be ruled out in the light of the first messages of the General Secretariat (Pablo Iglesias) whose pursuit of a "winning" discourse corresponds neither to the existing relationships of forces in society nor to the tasks required in the present phase in order to defeat the project of restoration of the "grand coalition".

The return of social conflict, which means now paying attention to the necessary solidarity with the dockers' struggle against the liberalization and the precariousness of the sector imposed by the EU and the government; the feminist movement's call for an international day of struggle on March 8; the initiatives that are being put forward by a social unionism that follows the example of the PAH (the movement that opposes evictions because of non-payment of mortgages); and the Tides (different social movements, each with its own colour, in the health, education, etc., sectors): all of these contribute to the search for a way to change the relationship of forces which puts at its service the institutional presence of Unidos Podemos, including the proposals it makes. Among these proposals there is also the demand for recognition by the Spanish state of the right to convene a referendum in Catalonia, with every guarantee for its future and the rejection of any form of repression that might be taken against this just demand of the majority of Catalan society.

PS:

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[1] Nancy Fraser, *Dissent Magazine* "[End of Progressive Neoliberalism](#)".

[2] See Michael Roberts' blog "[The global paradox](#)".

[3] Cedric Durand, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, February 2017, 256 "[Les remèdes toxiques À la crise financière](#)" ""With the combination of high levels of indebtedness, prices that do not reflect credit risks and the growing shortcomings in the world economy (such as Brexit, China's slowdown and the progressive eurozone banking crisis) There will be a generalized financial crisis in the next two years." (Trans IVP).

[4] The World Bank's World Development Report 2017 is titled [Governance and the Law](#). Beyond the usual jargon, it is significant that the World Bank Group that drafted the report is concerned with "power asymmetries" (where there is no lack of reference to Michel Foucault), particularly for exclusionary phenomena, Capturing and clientelism present in the ... undeveloped States. There is no lack of mention of the Spanish Transition. It is a model of how elites can adopt "rules that restrict their own power" ... to stay in power.

[5] See [-4885].