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Spanish State

How can we preserve the "biodiversity" of Podemos and build popular unity?

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"We are opening a new phase for Podemos because we have the obligation to open a new stage for the people"

Last Saturday, December 20, Alberto San Juan (film and theatre actor) in an interview broadcast during the evening programming of La Sexta TV, in conversation with the Gran Wyoming (real name, José Miguel Monzón Navarro, television presenter, humorist and writer), said "we are all Podemos", which is why instead of criticizing, we must act. I can only be in total agreement with this message. The problem is that it has many meanings, so it has different meanings and levels of meaning that have to be unravelled.

From the standpoint of the activist - which is my case - or, at least, of the person who is registered and is a virtual elector of Podemos, what San Juan affirms is a great truth. We became members because we wanted to - some of us from the very beginning - and we do not intend to join the legion of "podemosologues" dedicated to scoring points without rhyme or reason. However, we have an opinion, and we are going to act so that the party proposes to society and organizes itself in the way that we are convinced is best for the social majority [(the majority of the population, the exploited and oppressed.)

And here begins the first problem. The project of Podemos is going to be realized through an organizational model that is centralized and based on an "electoral war machine" - under the clear leadership of Pablo Iglesias; a leadership, I would like to clarify, that is undisputed and indisputable - as well as through ratification of its decisions by mechanisms which, in practice, prove to be plebiscitary (questions and answers on the Internet, on the basis of an overwhelming media presence of Iglesias).

Following the formal establishment of Podemos, and already before the European elections, there crystallized a confrontation and a lack of channels of dialogue between the sectors that had founded Podemos: the group of professors from the University of la Complutense in Madrid [(to which Pablo Iglesias and Juan Carlos Monedero belong) and Izquierda Anticapitalista (IA). The sharpest expression of this division was when the false "theory" was spread about, according to which IA was conspiring to "carry out a coup d'état" in order to win the leadership of the nascent organization.

This led to the justification of a manoeuvre, this time real and not imaginary, with the aim of occupying exclusively the leadership and completely excluding IA. That caused an estrangement between the two parties, which, as I have said many times, in no way favoured the project.

Given the manner in which the organizational model was approved following the Citizens' Assembly of Vista Alegre (in October 2014), it is not easy to say that all the components of Podemos can act without having to overcome significant restrictions. But above all, what concerns me is the fact that a practice has been established in the preparation of the lists for the election of internal leading bodies which makes difficult the representation of those who are not endorsed by the leading nucleus around Iglesias. Complete lists, individualized vote, limited debate on the projects, all of that in parallel with the prestige of the leadership and its access to the mass media, has resulted in the election of a one-colour Citizens' Council.

This method was repeated in the election of part of the municipal Citizens' Councils, crystallizing a formula where there exists only one "official" local candidacy, with the same name as the one that was headed by Pablo Iglesias for the Citizens' Council at the level of the state. The association of ideas is immediate for the voter. With this, in practice, the majority of Podemos, which holds an absolute majority in the leadership, is in the process of constituting itself as an organized tendency, although this was not its intention, nor was it announced or expressed publicly. If we

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add things up that supposes that in many cases whoever gets 75 per cent of the votes gets 100 per cent of the places on the Municipal Council (the local structure of Podemos). If this formula is crystallized, the plurality and the diversity that exist within Podemos, which are part of its richness and strength, will not be present in the leading bodies. In the absence of a more or less proportional plural participation in these bodies, the integration of internal plurality becomes more difficult. There will be sectors that will have great difficulty in considering themselves as full participants in Podemos.

I have always been convinced that on this question, the leadership will make changes in terms of practices and formulas, which can only be to the benefit of the entire organization. Otherwise, it will lose the "biodiversity", which will make it more vulnerable to the plague and epidemics. If internal changes going in the right direction take place, making possible polyphony and miscegenation, Podemos will strengthen itself in the face of new challenges and attacks - even more so if it gets into government - coming from the holy alliance between capital and the 1978 regime (the one that guaranteed a stable "exit" from Francoism), supported by the Bundesbank, the European Central Bank, the European Commission, the IMF - the new deadly quartet.

It is more likely - and, of course, it would be desirable - that in the next composition of lists - whether for internal bodies or primary and popular elections - we manage things so that the system of presenting candidates does not prevent the full participation and joint participation of all the sectors within the leadership of Podemos or of its institutional representation. There exist procedures and mechanisms for this purpose and they are consistent with the organizational norms of the organization.

For this reason, the announcement of the support of Pablo Iglesias for the candidacy of Teresa Rodríguez (one of the five MEPs - two of them women - of Podemos, who is a member of Izquierda Anticapitalista) in Andalusia is very encouraging. This could indicate the end of a stage of a "deficit" of internal cooperation and the beginning of another which normalizes the existence of different opinions within an organization. Podemos would then enter a phase where its practice includes diversity. If all the components of a political force act in a fair and fraternal manner with regard to the others, the pluralist democratic debate will make possible more effective unified action.

We must add a third level to the polysemic formula: "we are all Podemos". It concerns the whole of society. What is the social base that the leadership of Podemos seeks to win? What electoral base does it intend to build? I think the majority analysis within Podemos depends on the concept: "The 99 per cent against the one per cent." This approach prevents an understanding of all the antagonistic fronts that traverse a society in which, unfortunately, the one per cent has stable alliances among broad layers of the population, for economic reasons but also those relating to social cooptation and ideology. The present strategy of Podemos involves the adaptation of its discourse to electoral necessities and to the dominant "common sense" and the level of consciousness of the majority of the population that it is addressing. A project is being constituted that aspires to put together an electoral majority around the polarization "people" (la gente) against the "caste" (la casta), "the people" against "the oligarchy". It tends to subordinate the integration of social and political demands into its discourse and its programme to tactical electoral choices, which are therefore marked by immediate concerns. The criterion of selection is: does it or does it not help to build the widest possible national-popular unity to win the next general election.

Podemos is being constructed as an electoral party of a new type that does not seem to aspire to a territorial base through internal discussion and active participation of the Local Circles in its construction. It combines the delicate precision of its project of social change and its continual readjustment by electoral necessities, and the missing determination of its social support, with the formulation of more and more concrete proposals that are more and more pragmatic and which are destined to win support among the so-called middle classes. It aims to strengthen its "respectability" as a political force. In this sense, it relegates to a secondary level the relationship of the organization with the social movements.

We are thus renouncing the building of popular unity in search of popular power as a force that is antagonistic to the bourgeoisie. As far as I am concerned, I consider, on the contrary, that it is necessary to relate the work towards electoral victory and the formation of a left government, on the local level, on that of the autonomous communities, of

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the central state (the Spanish State is made up of 17 autonomous communities which have wide powers) with the impulsion and the strengthening of the mobilization, the organization and popular unity, starting from below. These two processes must reinforce each other in order to overcome these obstacles and to be able to deal with the reactionary counter-offensive which will amplify if Podemos forms a government.

The legitimate and necessary aspiration to take advantage of the window of opportunity offered by the present crisis of the regime and, above all, the decline of the two major parties (the Popular Party of Rajoy and the Spanish Socialist Party led by "young" Pedro Sanchez) is resulting in a rapid evolution of the positions of Podemos, leading to the moderation of the programme on which Podemos stood in the European elections in May 2014 on decisive questions. In this way, Podemos intends to appear as a realistic alternative government, exercising state responsibilities, and that the best people would be part of its government, people who are experts in their domain. The participatory development of the programmes of the popular forces is not mentioned, nor is the necessity for the future government to support and be supported by the strengthening and the direct participation of people's organizations. The moderation of the electoral programme and the discourse of Podemos has accompanied the increase in its electoral hopes and its evolution towards an attitude that, if the organization is not refocused, will end up imitating the model of the "catch-all" parties.

We have gone from looking for "centrality" through putting forward central themes which affect broad sectors of the population beyond their ideological affiliations, to the attempt to contest the PSOE for the political "centre". Hence the new social-democratic image that is projected in order to erase the more left-wing past of the electoral programme of the European elections. The draft economic programme for which two university professors (economically Keynesians and politically social-democrats, that is to say, Juan Torres and Vicenç Navarro) were given the responsibility has been the instrument for carrying out this operation. The model of relationship that the leadership wants to establish with the people means that, in its direct and unmediated relationship with the electorate, it can combine very different messages.

At this third level, that of the whole of society, we are not all Podemos. Within the society there are fractures that go well beyond the one per cent opposed to the 99 per cent. The class struggle exists and pursues its course. It seems that the document of the experts Torres and Navarro Torres on the proposals for an economic programme of Podemos forgets that the implementation of the measures will imply the "wrath of the markets."

It is unthinkable to establish at government level a programme for the social majority without envisaging conflict, without taking into account that the bourgeoisie does not need and does not want new pacts (such as those made on the way out of the dictatorship, the so-called "Moncloa pacts" of 1977). Because there are contradictions of interests between the various layers of society, we are not all Podemos in this country.

Those who are Podemos are those who have scores to settle with the regime that emerged from the 1978 reform and the "austericide" (the austerity that kills), those who work for a change in favour of the social majority. This is where we can find the material to strengthen the internal unity of Podemos and heal the wounds inflicted or suffered during the previous process. We are opening a new stage for Podemos because we have the obligation to open a new stage for the people.