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Spanish state

# Madrid: Rise of the Right, Defeat of the Left

- IV Online magazine - 2021 - IV556 - May 2021 -

Publication date: Monday 10 May 2021

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**The victory of the right in Madrid was overwhelming and the left has been left battered and in crisis. Podemos, on the other hand, was the product of an exceptional situation that cannot be repeated today. A political balance sheet has to be drawn up and a strategic readjustment is necessary.**

The victory of the right has been overwhelming. Overall, it achieved results that surpassed those of Esperanza Aguirre, previous right wing president of Madrid assembly, winning 58% of the votes against 41% for the left. This result becomes even more striking when we look at the turnout data. 80% of the people who could have voted have done so. The excuses about disaffection, the hidden left, the abstentionist masses who are really left-wing... disappear as quickly as they were frivolously outlined during the fever of the election. In this article, we will try to unravel some of the issues that have emerged from these elections in the Community of Madrid, with no other pretension than to contribute to the discussion within the political, cultural and social left.

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## The problem of hegemony

The hegemony of the right has several layers. On the one hand, it is built on a series of material relations that generate a certain consciousness. These are the public education system, the strategic position of Madrid in relation to the rest of Spain, the capacity to absorb a certain executive class that arises from it, and the neoliberal relationship between the public and the private sectors. Behind the power of the right there are social relations. But this relationship only forms the core of the hegemonic operation. To extend its influence, the right has broken with the dilemma of the left that placed “health” before “economy”. By defending the primacy of the economy, the right has incorporated large cohorts of the working class into its bloc. It has done so by offering a haven in the face of fear of unemployment and economic meltdown. Honestly, I do not believe that the left could dispute the centre of this hegemonic construction with the right in a “war of manoeuvres” or through short-term discursive operations. For that, years are needed. But I do believe that there was a layer of the electorate that was potentially winnable for the left. That layer, joined to the core of the right, has seen in the PP an option that responded to the issue of economic insecurity. We do not like the response of the right, but what is the response of the left? An insufficient and non-functioning minimum living income? A moralistic stance that (correctly) defends people who have to go to the food banks, but does not give them institutional support? In its moral arrogance, the left fails to realize that, by pitting health against the economy, it only reveals middle-class privilege. The right has taken advantage of the fact that people have been more afraid of the economic shutdown (with no guarantees or insurance) than of the pandemic. It is a terrible thing to say, but it is the truth.

## The question of fascism

In spite of the strategic “unity” shown in the campaign, the results for the left are really bad. The most significant thing is how the “fight against fascism”, the defence of the 78 regime as a barrier against it and the politics of blocs has worked out. We suppose, and forgive the irony, that the left will be happy: since the sum of the votes of the PP is greater than that of the left, Vox will not enter the government and will cease to be decisive. Now, once the elections and the moment of leftist delusions have passed, we can begin to reflect more seriously. Vox is a danger and is a party in the process of post-fascist radicalization. They must be fought by all means. But right now, the hegemonic enemy is Ayuso’s authoritarian neoliberalism, based on a conservative interpretation of the 78 regime. All the rhetoric

about fascism (which, in a moment of delirium, even extended to the PP) must be reassessed. It is not an academic debate: is there a fascist regime in Madrid? Was a fascist regime going to be implemented in Madrid? I believe, I insist, that Vox is evolving towards post-fascist positions. But making an impressionistic analysis to try to mobilize your base, indirectly calling a part of the people you want to win over fascist, is just a mechanism of hyperventilation, to consolidate your base, in the face of political impotence, and isolate yourself from the rest of the people. Because let us be even clearer. The situation has even been compared to Berlin in 1933. What is the response to this, if it is not frivolous talk? Is a response being prepared accordingly? Are we facing the prelude to a dictatorship and a political genocide? What is the phase of the struggle and what methods are adequate to face a moment of resistance of this type? We must raise this debate without underestimating the legitimate fear of a part of the people, especially the most oppressed sectors, in the face of the reappearance of post-fascism. It is necessary to fight in the streets against the extreme right, always from a broad perspective and in accordance with the times. But this means placing the problem of fascism in its precise place at this juncture, not turning it into a weapon to keep your base together that seeks to hide the fact that the institutional "left" is not governing in the interests of working people. And, above all, we must approach the rise of the hard right as a social process and not as a moral identity.

Let us be clear: the institutional left does not offer anything to the people that they feel the need to defend and, beyond the propaganda of its media spokespersons, its economic and social policy is favourable to the business classes. The progressive government is not delivering public policies that support and guarantee security to the most impoverished sectors of the people. There is nothing similar to the welfare policies of the first Lula government in Brazil or Peronism in Argentina. We are facing a progressivism as verbally oversold as meagre in its political impact, which does not even fulfil the programmatic promises it made when it became a government. The economic elites live in peace and the working class in fear. The progressive government is going to rescue the big companies with the money of the European Union. If the right wing were doing so, we would be talking about a general strike. Blindness and ideological fanaticism lead to allowing your own side to do the same as your adversaries. Instead, the left should be as loyal to the working people as the right is to the business class.

## Rise and crisis of the Eurocommunist revival

The main characteristic of the Podemos constitution is its dependence on the hyper-leadership of Pablo Iglesias. Undoubtedly, Pablo Iglesias is the most talented and brilliant person in his political current. He does not deserve the attacks he has suffered. But having said that, political balance sheets are necessary and, from my point of view, Pablo Iglesias's is very negative. Once all the elements of its internal life were purged, Podemos (which was also founded by the organization, Anticapitalistas, to which I belong) has been reduced to a small apparatus closed in on itself, with no internal life. In practice it is nothing more than a partner of the PSOE bloc. It compensates for these weaknesses with a certain management of its inheritance. Podemos came out of a relationship of semi-instrumental hegemony with the social movements of Madrid, based on a policy of transfers without nurturing their organizational strength and political autonomy. It does not make much sense to oppose the "political" level to the "social" one. They are two mutually dependent phenomena that feedback on each other and, whether we like it or not, the exhaustion of a whole cycle goes in both directions. There is a current in the social movements that is clearly pro-institutional and there is another that proposes a different perspective, one that does not want to be a mere transmission belt of the State. The decline of the Spanish left has deeper social roots than we would like to recognize.

One of the worst legacies of our times is the hegemony of political science over politics. Everything is reduced to rhetoric and the arithmetic of winning without a strong political project. I think we must assume that nobody has a political potion to remedy the victory of the right. But we must return to a political position based on the "must be". This clashes with the common sense of a whole generation, forged on the opportunistic idea that in order to win, principles can be twisted at will. It ended up in an extreme politicization finally resulting in an endless number of tactical turns, programmatic abandonments and rhetorical games. I think that a left must emerge that abandons the rhetoric in which we have moved in the previous cycle to assume the thankless minority task, to save its progressive

elements that have been buried today. We need to articulate political and social struggles around a confrontation with the economic elites. We support the necessity of a new political framework that addresses constitutional questions. In my opinion, this involves reversing the strategy offered by the left. The left has acted as a unity politically, assuming in practice the project of a “left constitutionalism” (to different degrees) but divided socially. These elections have resembled a Democratic Party primary: a strong consensus around the defence of order, different identities competing under a shared horizon. But in the social sphere there is no united struggle. The equation must be inverted: clarity to rebuild politically, “separating” from the institutional left while always trying to maintain (and this is important) a relationship of non-sectarian dialogue and maximum unity on the front of social struggles. I do not believe that this strategy should be presented as an electoral winner (although the current strategy has not been either) or as the source of all solutions, but as a different path to be taken. From my point of view, anti-capitalism should not be the radical wing of the progressive front. It should build another political pole and, at the same time, be socially united. The politics of unity must move from the political to the social, with the aim of increasing the self-confidence of the working class people through struggle. I believe that without a “social” regeneration of the left, the emergence of new repertoires and new organic intellectuals linked to new resistances, the situation will not improve but will tend to stagnate and rot. Moreover, I believe that we must begin to think that, although the great changes can only be made by the social majority, the existence of a class struggle pole is a democratizing element in itself. It allows certain problems to be put on the table and makes social progress possible: if there is only a “left” management, any reform is impossible.

## A new left? On Más Madrid

I think it would be an illusion to see in the rise of Más Madrid a turn to the left. Not because UP was on the left: UP represents the return to the politics of right-wing Eurocommunism of the 70s, based on the defence of the constitutional-capitalist system against the right. Incidentally, there is no right-wing that wants to break with that regime, but to radicalize it in a reactionary way. I believe that Más Madrid overtook the PSOE not because it is more radical, but because it represents something different. This does not diminish the importance of the fact, but it does put it in its context. It has acted as a bloc and there has been no ideological conflict between the parties. Más Madrid has always adopted the political trend of green progressivism, but it has a number of advantages over the “left” parties. The first is to appear as something new, despite their experience in the Madrid City Council, which did not weaken it, but rather strengthened them, unlike the PSOE-UP, whose presence in government weakens them. The second is that they connect with a sui generis political component of Madrid, a working class and enlightened middle class, linked to the defence of the public sphere, but also to the struggle for liberties and civil rights. Although its leaders have an upper-middle class profile, its electoral base penetrates better in heterogeneous and plural working class neighbourhoods that no longer correspond to the conceptions of the old post-communist left. We only have to compare the results of MM and UP in working class neighbourhoods such as Orcasitas or Vallecas. Their campaign has been successful because it has connected with the political composition to which it appealed. United Podemos appeals to the working class, but does not connect with it. Thirdly, they had a candidate with an excellent profile for this type of election. Más Madrid has also opted for addressing the left without the mediation of social movements, but at the same time, it has a territorial structure, not very visible in struggles but real enough, especially through neighbourhood members and councillors. In my opinion, with all the limits of comparison, Más Madrid can have the same competitive relationship that the German Greens have with the SPD: a green “social-democratic-liberal” project. But it remains to be seen if this strengthens Más País at the state level. I think it opens a strong internal squabble. In a country with a confederal political composition, MP appears as too Madrid-based, which is a constraint on its expansion

## What perspective for anti-capitalists?

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I believe that anti-capitalists, politically isolated in a situation where the main axis has turned towards the constitutionalist defense of the regime of 78 in the face of a “greater evil”, must readjust their strategy and discourse. It is about playing on an anomalous playing field: proposing fundamental solutions for the left, but assuming that you cannot apply them and that, therefore, it is necessary to strengthen an anti-capitalist project as a precondition for this. To be socially united, but to promote resistance and not to stop it, fighting against the “ extended state” intervention in the social movements (that is, turning social movements into lobbies within the institutional framework, without a global perspective of transformation). At the same time, we must generate a political pole at the margin of the progressive bloc, relating with it in a pedagogical way but without falling into the opportunism that ends up turning anti-capitalism into the left wing of progressivism. To understand that we must work culturally to regenerate a militant network. Above all because, in the absence of the masses, the people who have taken over as organic intellectuals have been a caste of journalists and political scientists enslaved to their material interests in the progressive court. Also we need to work on forms of political communication that renew worn out repertoires. We take on board that the electoral arena is not enough, but that in the absence of a revolutionary situation, it is necessary to orient ourselves towards the construction of a political reference point. If we do not want the elections to be an exercise in cognitive dissonance, where verbal radicalism in social matters correlates with support for political options that defend the regime of 1978. Saying “down with capitalism” in theory and supporting co-government with the PSOE in practice.

Despite the restoration of the old order, the Spanish political situation remains unstable. Madrid may be a warning that the “ magical” thesis that the progressive bloc would rule for ten years in Spain is simply a positivist fantasy. The right wing may rearm and go on the offensive: the progressive government has already announced social cuts such as tolls on highways, which put the right wing in an ideal position to recompose itself, since they allow it to take its anti-tax discourse to the popular classes. Nobody knows what will happen at the state level. How the figure of Yolanda Diaz (Iglesias’s anointed successor and the representative of the social consensus) will work, and how the left will recompose itself. There are many unknowns: Andalusia, new alliances... Podemos was the product of an exceptional situation. Today that situation does not exist, and the left is once again occupying its traditional positions in the political order. But although we have entered a much rockier phase, we are still imprisoned by the moral legacy of the previous cycle, where the illusions of victory monopolized the electoral intervention. In my opinion, the possibility of moving forward as a whole will depend on the resurgence of a social and political force outside the official left and progressivism. Or, at least, not retreating too far.

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [Jacobin America Latina](#).*

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