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Spanish state

Anticapitalistas leave Podemos

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On 14 May 2020, Anticapitalistas, a founding component of Podemos and historical current of the radical left in the Spanish state linked to the Fourth International, announced its departure from Podemos. In reality, this decision was taken on 28 March when, in an internal consultation process in which 79% of activists participated, 89% voted in favour of leaving Podemos (3% against and 7.5% abstentions). The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, which hit the Spanish state hard and in particular the most vulnerable sectors of the popular classes, led to the public announcement of this decision being postponed. [1]

Raúl Camargo, a member of the Anticapitalistas leadership and a former member of the Madrid Regional Assembly, was interviewed by *eldiario.es* from his apartment where he is locked down with his family. The health crisis caused by the coronavirus will, he says, lead to a worsening of neoliberal policies. The participation of Podemos in the coalition government will not, according to him, block this new wave of restrictive measures insofar as it is the PSOE (the Socialist Party of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez) which assumes the leadership while the party they helped create six years ago is now "subordinate" to it. "This is precisely what they said they would not do, and it is not original", he said.

This is why Anticapitalistas decided to break with Podemos. As Camargo points out, the time has come "to engage and contribute jointly with other collectives, social movements and various platforms to the creation of a wave of mobilizations to oppose the restrictions and the neoliberal offensive which is taking shape in the short term". This break undoubtedly marks the end of a cycle for the radical left in the Spanish state and more broadly for what has been designated as "left populism" for which Podemos has been, in Europe and in the western world, the central benchmark.

Six years after the founding of Podemos, you are leaving this party. Why?

Our decision follows the debate that we have had for many months, practically since last October, where we have considered everything that has happened in recent years, marked by ever greater differences with the Podemos leadership. Finally, we think that the most honest thing is to choose to break up in a fraternal form. We have endeavoured to do this openly, communicating our decision to the Podemos leadership. We are making it public today because the Citizens' Assembly of Podemos will be held.

We have learned a lot from our experience within Podemos. We contributed to its formation and it was something very important in the history of our current. In the end, things did not work out as many of us thought and we think it is better to leave it, in a fraternal form and without concealing the political and organizational motivations that led us to this choice. The door remains open to collaboration in the social and political fields and on all occasions, with Podemos as with the entire left. We are not leaving out of a desire to reassert our identity, and we know there is much to share in many areas. But not in all areas, because we defend another strategy in relation to the social-liberal left.

We remember from the history of Podemos this meeting or conversation between friends that was held at your home with Miguel Urbán and Pablo Iglesias. It was one of the founding acts of the party. What memories do you have of this episode in autumn 2013?

I have a pleasant memory of it, with the enthusiasm of the great project which animated us, even if other very tough moments followed because of the internal tensions which occurred practically from the beginning. We have no

regrets about making this choice and we think it was the right thing to do at the time.

In autumn 2013, for us, and we considered that this was also true for Pablo Iglesias, it was essential not to repeat the mistakes of Izquierda Unida who had just entered the government of Andalusia. [2] In the first period of Podemos, an essential question was the assertion that for this party there was no question of submitting to either the PP or the PSOE, and that it therefore defined itself as a new, innovative space, suitable for bringing together different social and political forces of the left which aspired to a profound transformation of society.

In the first press conference held by Podemos at its foundation, at the Barrio theatre, I think it was perfectly clear. Then things changed. We did not agree, and we discussed it. But in the first phase of Podemos, the idea of not submitting to the PP or the PSOE and that we were going to build something radically new was very strong. This largely explains our gradual distancing from the orientation of the leadership.

Podemos has also defined itself as a force of government willing, to paraphrase Pablo Iglesias, to get their hands dirty and to govern, to surf on its contradictions, to participate in institutions, not to be Jiminy Cricket, but indeed to govern.

But the original goal was to go beyond the traditional parties and not to convert ourselves, so to speak, into the crutch of one or the other. We have always said that we were not satisfied with our scores, especially when we participated for the first time in the European elections, because we hoped for results that would make it possible to become the governing force of this country. We hoped it would happen more quickly. But that was not the case. It was necessary to adopt a slower strategy to build, with a social implantation, the construction of territorial and sectoral committees, with real roots, and a fraternal political culture which, in our opinion, did not develop in Podemos. The initial orientation prevailed for as long as Podemos improved its electoral results. Then came the turning point.

It is legitimate to believe that this is the way to move forward. But that is not our position and many historical examples testify to the trajectory of parties that have made this bet. We do not pretend to have the absolute truth, we can be wrong, but we firmly believe that this is not the right choice.

Do you think Pablo Iglesias and the Podemos leadership betrayed the original foundational bases of Podemos?

I wouldn't use those words. We believe that today's Podemos is no longer that of the origins. The Podemos in government is not the Podemos of the Mover Ficha manifesto. [3] It has evolved towards moderate positions which do not convince us, any more than we were convinced by those adopted by Izquierda Unida, this is why we impelled the creation of Podemos. There was a social and political demand for forces which would be different from those that existed, with their ankylotic functioning, or from those which ruled in alliance with the parties of the regime. It was one of the 15M slogans, "PSOE or PP, it's the same shit".

This evolution is classic. The Eurocommunist parties of the 1970s and 1980s followed it and the results are known. Today it is highlighted that they participated in the drafting of the Constitution and that they introduced articles with social content. But these parties have paid a very high price for these policies of collaboration with other forces. Some people think it was a good choice and that we have to claim it. On the contrary, I think it should not be our benchmark. We do not share this trajectory.

In terms of self-criticism, what could Anticapitalistas have done within Podemos? In internal polls, the division within Podemos always appears as one of the elements that has led to an increasing distance between the party and its electorate.

There may be an original error there. When Podemos was created, Anticapitalistas was the spinal column organization which was relied upon, both because of its territorial presence and because of the contributions of its activists. We melted into it and didn't say we were a component of it and one of the forces that drove it.

Faced with the personality of Pablo Iglesias, and faced with what Pablo Iglesias defended afterwards, our organization seemed to be playing submarines. This was not the case. Anticapitalistas was a very decisive founding force, as was Pablo Iglesias. At the same level. Our mistake was not to state it from the first day, not to let it be known that without Anticapitalistas, Podemos would not have seen the light of day. We appeared as a foreign entity, a formation which had joined Podemos after seeing its success, when it was absolutely not the case. We were there from the first day, long before many of those who accused us.

We appeared in debates prior to Vistalegre 1 and beyond as a bizarre thing. We paid the price of this forced clandestine existence. The structure adopted by Podemos at Vistalegre 1 and thereafter placed an organization like ours in a rather eccentric situation. Currents were barely allowed, even if there was something other than currents, as we saw later. The result was a very difficult situation for an organization like ours. We turned into an association, and we had no intention of dissolving.

There are other things we did wrong. We concluded an agreement, for example, for the Citizens' Assembly of the Community of Madrid, with Ramón Espinar, who belonged at the time to the group of Pablo Iglesias. The deal did not even last as long as a piece of candy at the door of a school. At the end of five months, Pablo Iglesias decided to invest in Áigo Errejón, bypassing the decisions of this Citizens' Assembly during which, at the cost of great efforts by Anticapitalistas, the theses defended by Errejón had been repudiated in Madrid. We should have assessed better the quality of the alliances that we entered into because they did not hold. There too, we paid for it.

Before the creation of Podemos, Anticapitalistas did not have the same institutional and media presence as it then acquired. Beyond the problems you mention, you do not fear losing this in this new situation?

It's a possibility. But if we created Podemos, it was not to have posts, but because a political force was needed to face the bloodiest aggressions of this system. Originally we said it would be nice if we got an MEP, which would be Pablo Iglesias. That would have been enough for our happiness. Despite all the difficulties in Podemos, such as the ban on dual membership and the multiple manoeuvres to prevent us from having any post, internal or public, we were able to gain some. It is true that this gave us some significance, but we are an organization which goes beyond the question of having or not having representatives in the institutions. Having them is useful and we will try to have more. But we don't think it's fundamental today.

What is fundamental for us is the formation of a very broad social bloc in the face of what is coming, the challenges that face us. In the preparatory texts for our conference, which we were unable to organize, but which will be held as soon as possible, we spoke of the possibility of a form of explosion in the economic situation which we are undergoing. But we could not foresee that it would happen now and in the form in which it occurs, with the consequences that will result from it. It's going to be bloody. In this situation, the most important is the articulation of a plural social bloc to respond to the attacks that are sure to happen.

In this context, we will consider how to approach the electoral question in the years to come. In the short term, we have no plans for an initiative at this level and we have decided to devote ourselves to building this social body in the face of the attacks which, we are convinced, will occur very soon.

Faced with these aggressions that you foresee, having left Podemos do you think that you will have enough weight to change the living conditions of people?

Yes. Why not ? Obviously it will not depend only on us, that's very clear from our point of view. It is not only with the will, choices and decisions of Anticapitalistas that we can achieve this. But if Anticapitalistas is to engage and contribute jointly with other collectives, social movements and various platforms to the creation of a wave of mobilizations to oppose the restrictions and the neoliberal offensive which is taking shape in the short term, we think that this can have an influence that will go far beyond what Podemos decides, a Podemos which is part of a government led by the PSOE and therefore has no free hand to do what he would like. They must submit, so to speak, to the orientations set by a government in which they are only a minority component.

Beyond what Podemos can do in the present circumstances, we believe that with the room for manoeuvre we have and our relationships with various collectives, we also have significant potential for action, while remaining modest. We are a small organization, we do not aim for any hegemony in the field of the left in the short term and we believe that it is necessary to reach out and collaborate with many organizations, collectives and parties of the left.

You spoke of a Podemos subordinate to the PSOE and said one of the questions was not repeating the mistakes of Izquierda Unida who participated in the Andalusian regional government with the PSOE, and not to submit to bipartisanship. Do you think that the management of this health, economic and social crisis would be the same with a PSOE-Ciudadanos government, for example, or a government in which the PP participated?

With a PSOE-Ciudadanos government it would be worse. They would no doubt have taken more neoliberal measures. A minority government of the PSOE alone, with a force like Podemos lobbying from the outside without having to swallow snakes, might have been better. Because the PSOE would have needed votes in parliament on a case-by-case basis, otherwise it would be beaten. Voting is not guaranteed by participation in the Council of Ministers, and it is necessary to negotiate vote after vote, measure after measure. It was before its participation in the government that Podemos obtained a significant increase in the minimum wage. I do not see why that could not be the case in the current situation.

You have explained the line that Anticapitalistas will follow in this new situation. But one place where its presence is particularly remarkable is in Andalusia where Teresa Rodríguez and José María González are prominent figures. What do you plan to do in Andalusia? Bet on Adelante Andalucía as your own project? Engage in a competition with Podemos in the autonomous and municipal elections?

Anticapitalistas Andalucía has publicly announced its membership as the fifth organization in Adelante Andalucía, on an equal basis with the other four which were already members of it. [4] The path chosen by our comrades in Andalusia aims to build Adelante Andalucía as a subject which is plural and, importantly, has an Andalusian identity. Andalusian decisions must be made in Andalusia.

Adelante Andalucía has already presented candidates in most cities and in regional elections. Anticapitalistas Andalucía will devote itself to the construction and development of Adelante as a plural and open subject. When it was created, the agreements that were signed established that Adelante would not participate in governments with the PSOE, neither at the level of the autonomous region of Andalusia, nor at the municipal level. These agreements were then signed by Izquierda Unida and Podemos.

Besides Andalusia, it is in Madrid that your presence in Podemos was most striking and it is there, for the most part, that your activity developed. What will Anticapitalistas do? Are you going to continue the Madrid en Pie project? Will you maintain the same alliances?

When we see the situation of the Madrid left there is really nothing to be happy about. . It requires criticism and

self-criticism. Witness Isabel DÃ-az Ayuso at the presidency of the Autonomous Community, the enormities that she utters and that she accomplishes daily, that constantly reminds us of our inability to drive her out, despite the seriousness of the corruption cases that have marked the previous legislature. [5] This is a persistent question for all the components of the Madrid left. This is absolutely lamentable. Within Anticapitalistas in Madrid the debate is open to define the path we will follow. We want to initiate very broad social fronts to respond now to the most vicious policies of Ayuso and Almeida.

We believe that we must be in opposition to Almeida. To consider him as a kind of benefactor does not seem acceptable to us in the present situation. City hall social services are closed and there are huge queues in restaurants set up by social collectives. That alone justifies opposing him from the first second. When poverty once again overwhelms the working-class neighbourhoods of Madrid, it cannot be said that the mayor is up to the task. And at the level of the Autonomous Community, it is also necessary to initiate broad social alliances to defeat the policies which will mean a new turn of the screw for the working classes.

As for Madrid en Pie, everything is on stand-by. [6] There have been no new meetings or revived activity. We will take stock when we find a certain normality, I do not know if we can talk about a new normality or how to talk about the situation that will open. We think we have to build something that will be different. It is rumoured that Ayuso could advance the elections. If this is the case, we will have to discuss how the Madrid left should respond to this challenge.

There are many unknowns and it is necessary to take the time to sit down to discuss them calmly and to rebuild in a way a social bloc which is opposed to this openly neoliberal right which leads the Community of Madrid. It is shameful that a party like the corrupt PP could have stayed in power for so long without any of the scandals that hit it driving it out. This is due to the inability of the left to offer solid alternatives to the barbaric model of the right.

During the previous legislature you were regional deputy for Podemos in the Madrid Assembly, and you denounced a problem which today, unfortunately, makes the headlines and constitutes one of the major concerns facing the pandemic: the situation of homes for the elderly in the area. You were able to assert the claims of the employees and improve the conditions of certain residences. Will all this work get lost now? Or will you be able to pursue it?

It's doable, and it's in progress. There is Marea Residencias which does many things. It had already organized a large demonstration in Madrid on November 26, 2019 and has just filed a complaint against DÃ-az Ayuso. It brings together many families and employees in this sector. This example shows that we can do politics while being outside the institutions. The important thing is to want it, to continue to act loyally with all the people I have worked with as a deputy, and to continue to do so even if I no longer have a formal title.

It is true that working in the institutions is also important. I presented a bill that the PP and Ciudadanos rejected, with the abstention of the PSOE. There were provisions in that law that I think would have been very beneficial in the present situation because there would have been a lot more staff to deal with the drama that was going to happen. The premises would have been better adapted, and the families better informed from the first day because they would have had representatives on the user councils.

The right rejected it because it was too expensive. The senior citizens' housing sector lobbied various parliamentary groups not to support this law which, if they are to be believed, would mean ruin for their business. Their business, yes. This is the problem. This work can be continued. The law is ready. Other groups can take it on board and improve it by making it even tougher and more restrictive in view of all that has happened.

Everything we said then was true. The same people who laughed and insulted me today say that they are going to be caring for the elderly. They would have been well advised to have done so three or four years ago when we reported this situation, because it probably could have saved lives.

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [Contretemps](#).

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[1] See 14 May, "[Statement by Anticapitalistas on leaving Podemos](#)".

[2] Izquierda Unida is a coalition formed in 1986, the main component of which is the Spanish Communist Party. Izquierda Anticapitalista (which became Anticapitalistas in 2014) was part of it between 1995 and 2008, leading the Espacio Alternativo movement within it. Izquierda Unida has been allied with Podemos since 2016, as part of the Unidos Podemos electoral coalition, and its leader, Alberto Garzón, is currently Minister of Consumer Affairs in the government led by the socialist Pedro Sanchez.

[3] This text, entitled "Mover ficha: convert la indignación en cambio político" ("Move the cursor: convert indignation into political change") was made public on 14 January 2014. Among its signatories were personalities from the radical left and social movements, including several future members of the leadership of Podemos, like Juan Carlos Monedero and of Anticapitalistas, like Jaime Pastor or Teresa Rodriguez.

[4] Adelante Andalucía is a coalition formed in 2018 between Podemos Andalucía, Izquierda Unida and two components from the radical "Andalusian" left in order to create an alternative to the regional government led by the PSOE. At the 2018 regional elections its list was led by Tereza Rodriguez of Anticapitalistas, and the score obtained (16.2%, 17 deputies) was considered a significant success.

[5] Isabel DÃ-az Ayuso is a member of the right wing Popular Party and has been president of the Madrid Autonomous Community since August 2019 through a coalition of the PP, Ciudadanos, and the far right party, Vox.

[6] Madrid En Pie is a coalition formed by Izquierda Unida, Anticapitalistas Madrid and Bancada Municipalista to contest the 2019 municipal elections in Madrid.