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Spain

# Neither half full nor half empty

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**In spite of the dramatic significance that this 16th Congress of the PCE had been accorded inside Izquierda Unida (some had presented it as almost a replay of the 6th assembly of IU) its development and results do not seem to have fulfilled such expectations. It could be seen as nothing more than an inventory of the diverse positions existing inside 'the party'. However, things are somewhat more complex; to clarify this, we will analyse some of its more relevant aspects.**

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If we rely on texts, resolutions and approved amendments it seems that, to take the concrete case of the Basque conflict, support for dialogue and therefore, the rejection of the banning of Herri Batasuna, prevailed. However, this is not apparent from the report of Paco Frutos, which, surprisingly, does not contain a single reference to the Basque problem or the question of the right to self-determination. More forcefully expressed is the orientation to work in the anti-globalisation movement and to support combative positions in the CC.OO as fundamental axes of the PCE's work. A militant attitude remains towards work in the social movements; in the case of the unions this has led to a position (a dangerous one, considering the diversity of its membership) in favour of the critical current of the CC.OO.

Enormous confusion continued at the international level, with the PCE remaining imprisoned in the political loyalties of the old 'international Communist movement'; that led to the invitation to the so-called Communist Parties of China or Korea, to give two examples of which there are plenty more. This is reflected also in the placing on the same level of the Forum of Sao Paulo and that of Porto Alegre, or taking shelter in a single reference (and for some, that is already an advance) to 'possible political responsibilities of Milosevic'.

The political repercussions of the anti-globalisation movement, on which an interesting reflection has begun, and the tremendous changes in the international panorama after September 11, do not seem to have opened a breach in the international politics of the PCE, which remains within the old parameters.

What impact will the outcome of the Congress have on the PCE's line within IU? It's difficult to say. Indubitably, the PCE as such is not extending its influence or political weight within IU. The reason is obvious: the PCE as an organizational bloc does not exist, but this is a question to which we will return.

It would also be possible to analyse whether, through its weight at the Congress, such-and-such a current of the PCE is going to acquire more or less influence in IU, but in the context of a zero sum game between such currents. Even in absolute terms, the global result of that sum has been decreasing since the creation of IU (if we take that as the moment of reference), considering the constant decline in affiliations the PCE has experienced since then. In the short term, it does not seem that the outcome of the PCE congress is relevant to the present correlation of IU forces.

At the organizational level, we can note the continuity of general secretary Francisco Frutos, based on a coalition with Llamazares. This time, the formation of a bloc around the platform 'Partido Vivo', led by Angeles Maestro, produced some surprising confluences. The final result gave an estimated 59% to the sector of Frutos, 21% to the Platform 'Partido Vivo' and 20% to the followers of Llamazares. Few changes, then.

## PCE 2

The PCE maintains a high internal diversity. Practically all the plurality of IU has its reflection (often its origin) within the PCE. In fact, the three candidacies that confronted each other at the 6th Assembly of IU were headed by leaders of the PCE.

It is surprising, therefore, that we have the continued prohibition of currents in a party shot through with differences and divergences. Thus, given the non-existence of authentic currents of opinion that could articulate the disparities in the political terrain, difference are expressed - with the exception of the 'Partido Vivo' platform - around nuclei of influence which cannot really be described from the ideological point of view.

Nevertheless, it would be unjust to finish the analysis at this point. These nuclei of influence are formed not only around the internal struggle for power but around very substantial divergences on how politics should be practiced in the PCE and above all in IU. And method in politics is no small thing.

The last part of this brief analysis starts from a note: the Congress served to bury, at least in this political cycle, the feeling generated since the electoral defeat of 1999 in broad sectors of the PCE, although not always specified publicly, summed up in the question: 'What use is the IU to us, if we score almost the same percentage of votes as we did the last time we appeared as the CP?' A question that reflects a reality on which there has been little reflection: the character of the PCE since the creation of the IU.

The PCE was the key to the construction of the IU, putting to the service of the project not only its ideas and the work of its militants, but a good part of its material resources. The initial political arc of the IU was composed of several tiny parties and a PCE that constituted 90% of IU affiliation. Since then, a double process has occurred: loss of the formal plurality of IU (although diversity from the political point of view remains) and gradual reduction of the presence of the PCE inside IU, where almost half of affiliates are no longer from the PCE

So, from an initial stage characterized by the generosity of the PCE towards the other much smaller component organizations of IU, we arrive at the current situation with an over representation of the PCE in the leadership bodies and public positions of IU in relation to its real weight in the coalition.

What is the nature of the PCE today, then? It is difficult to qualify it as a political current inside IU, because, as we said, the PCE is made up of several political currents that replicate the divergences of the PCE inside IU and vice versa.

It is a party, in the formal sense of the word, but is inserted in another formation under whose rubric it has contested elections for the last 16 years, as opposed to the nine when it presented itself as the PCE. Moreover, there is already a sense within the PCE that its strategic and not simply electoral project is the IU. With this there is the paradox that an organization that has existed for 81 years, that already was very plural, even in the last years of the dictatorship, acts like a single voice in another organization of which it forms part, IU. This distance between word and deed is a source of misunderstanding and frustration, a permanent hindrance to the development of IU and leads to a false question in the minds of many PCE militants: 'What use is the IU?' This renders difficult the complex analysis of the situation of the forces to the left of social democracy in Europe, the relation between mobilization and social articulation with politics, the influence of the contradictory construction of the Spanish state on a state-wide political force and so on. In short, it remains difficult to evaluate if the PCE is going to be obstacle to the renovation and the opening up of IU or a factor in the resolution of the existing tension

It is possible that the greatest virtue of this Congress has been to leave things as they were, not to try to resolve things which in logically must be resolved within IU and in through the relationship of the latter with the most combative sectors of society.