

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/Radiance-and-sunset-of-Podemos-reasons-for-a-farewell>



Spanish state

The Rise and Fall of Podemos: Reasons for a Farewell

- Debate - Building new parties of the left -

Publication date: Wednesday 16 September 2020

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

The creation of Podemos in the Spanish state represented a significant attempt to build a mass, anti-neoliberal, and pluralistic party to the left of social liberalism. That experiment, which began very well, ultimately ended very badly. Perhaps for this reason, the title of this article could have been “The Rise and Fall of Podemos... as an Emancipatory Political Project.” The aim of this article is to explain why it was necessary to create Podemos and why it has been necessary to abandon it.

This has also involved reflecting on the assessment that can be made and the lessons that can be learned from the actions of the Anticapitalist Left, now Anticapitalistas. [\[1\]](#)

Podemos was able to emerge because the social democratic and Eurocommunist left were at a dead end after the 2008 crisis. The emergence of the 15M movement in 2011 was the catalyst for the appearance of new political expectations in a context characterised by the unstoppable advance of the right-wing People’s Party (Partido Popular or PP) against the socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. The United Left (Izquierda Unida or IU) proved incapable of confronting neoliberal policies, and the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party, the Spanish social-democracy (Partido Socialista Obrero Español or PSOE) was one of its implementers. Both parties bore the heavy burden of having contributed to the creation of the political regime of the Transition [from the Francoist dictatorship to parliamentary democracy] through the political pact with forces from the Franco regime, enshrined in the 1978 Spanish Constitution. Both parties were part of that regime, and in the case of the PSOE, it has been one of its main pillars.

On the other hand, there was widespread apathy and social demobilisation caused primarily by the misguided strategy of a social pact at all costs (social concertation) of the major unions, CC OO (Comisiones Obreras or Workers Commissions) and UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores or General Union of Workers), and the inability of the minority unions to build a new hegemony within the workers’ movement, with the exception of the class-based unions LAB (Langile Abertzaleen Batzordeak (Basque for Nationalist Workers’ Committees) and ELA (Eusko Langileen Alkartasuna or Basque Workers’ Solidarity) in the Basque Country. This enabled the reform of Article 135 of the Spanish Constitution, which made the payment of public debt a priority in the General State Budget, and the imposition of two regressive labour reforms: firstly, the one approved by the socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, later worsened by the legislation of the Popular Party (PP) government, presided over by Mariano Rajoy, which diminished collective bargaining, curtailed the role of unions in companies and attacked or annulled important rights of the working class, which produced a large wage devaluation, increased inequality, a greater weight of capital income than wage income in the gross domestic product (GDP), an increase in job insecurity and an extension of poverty, with a special impact on young people, practically expelled from the labour market.

As a result, the 15M movement emerged as a protest against the deteriorating social situation and as a catalyst against political stagnation. This opened a window of opportunity to substantially alter the political landscape in the Spanish state. Podemos came to fill this void and presented itself as the tool to create a new balance of power in the political sphere, which, if consolidated, could have helped to strengthen social organisation and mobilisation.

In this context, an exception must be made to highlight the importance of the mass mobilisations of the Diadas (Catalan National Days) and the protests and challenges of 2014 and October 1-3, 2017, in Catalonia. These events expressed national aspirations and the demand for the right to self-determination of an entire people, creating the largest known rift in the framework of the 1978 regime and becoming its main source of crisis. During these moments, the political left—including Podemos and its allies in Catalonia—squandered a golden opportunity to lead the largest democratic mass popular movement in recent decades in the Spanish State and challenge the other

actors for political hegemony and leadership.

But Podemos rapidly aged into decrepitude because it ended up accepting the discursive framework and limitations of the 1978 European Commission, the market economy, and the European Union as the only possible horizon. This has meant a failure of the Podemos project and a defeat for the left that promoted it. And yet, it was unavoidable to try. And worthwhile.

The 15M movement (strengths and weaknesses) in the genealogy and *raison d'être* of Podemos

The irruption of the Indignados movement on May 15, 2011, in the squares and streets of Madrid, which immediately spread to all the towns and cities of the Spanish State, including Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia, meant the appearance on the scene of the social mobilisation of a new generation that did not identify with parliamentary parties ("they do not represent us"), was especially affected by austerity policies ("we will not pay for this crisis"), confronted the financial elites who benefited from state aid to rescue the banks ("this is not a crisis, it is a scam") and denounced the limits of the political regime ("they call it democracy and it is not").

Therefore, it was a movement with an anti-regime vocation, configured around democratic-radical demands that questioned the imperfect two-party model embodied by the PSOE and the PP, but also the alternation in the government of the State, sometimes socialist, sometimes conservative, and the electoral model. But it also became an anti-austerity movement against predatory economic and social policies that were contrary to popular sovereignty, especially after the reform of Article 135 of the Spanish Constitution and the bailouts of Spanish banks, which involved a public investment currently estimated at 65 billion euros by the Bank of Spain. Therefore, the 15M movement, albeit in a basic way, demanded a different economy, a different model of society, and the need for a new Constitution. This was its great contribution and a demonstration of its creative energy based on the activity of mass sectors. The 15M movement came to enjoy the sympathy of the majority of the population, fed up with the period of austerity that began in 2008 and the political sclerosis of the system.

The 15M movement represented a complete overhaul of the established political parties and unions, paving the way for a sustained popular mobilisation across diverse sectors (the so-called *mareas* or "tides" of education, healthcare, public sector workers, etc.) that operated relatively independently of bureaucracies and with new forms of organisation and coordination. The 15M movement generated new forms of mass civil disobedience, based on assemblies as the organising principle, which quickly overwhelmed traditional organisations. Environmental and feminist activists, as well as young people gaining their first experience with activism, joined the 15M movement.

It is worth highlighting that the 15M movement, thanks to its critique of the 1978 regime, enabled debate on the need for a democratic rupture and the opening of a constituent/constituent process, which, over time, led Anticapitalistas and other sectors to speak in the plural, since a set of constituent processes was needed to be coordinated that took into account the existence of the national question and not only the general dimension of the Spanish State.

But the 15M movement also revealed the limitations of a social movement without political expression, and specifically, without electoral representation. In 2013, the political situation was at a standstill. Very soon, among the more progressive sectors of activism, the debate began regarding the need for a political tool. While they all agreed that no political force that might be created could claim to represent the 15M movement, there is no doubt that Podemos benefited from the spirit of the Indignados.

The Dilemmas of Anticapitalistas

In the months leading up to the launch of Podemos, the debate within Anticapitalistas about what to do centered

around three positions. The first advocated forming a left-wing front or a tactical alliance with IU, which was hampered by the latter's recent history of subservience to the Socialist Party, both in pre-electoral agreements at the national level and in its experience of co-governing in Andalusia and many municipalities, as well as its growing disrepute among left-wing youth. Another proposal advocated promoting a front of radical left-wing organisations, all of them small except in the Basque Country and partially in Catalonia, scarcely established and with sectarian features, which would have meant that Anticapitalistas would have placed itself outside the broad current of mass radicalisation that emerged on 15M.

A third option, supported by the leadership, proposed to promote some kind of new initiative, as it considered that the existing left-wing structures at that time were incapable of being useful in making a leap that would bring the social struggle to the political level. This last option proved to be the majority view. Within Anticapitalistas, and its predecessor Espacio Alternativo, there was a debate about the need to support the emergence of mass, democratic, anti-neoliberal organisations capable of waging electoral battles in a way that complemented the social struggles driven by grassroots movements. Therefore, when Podemos was conceived, great importance was given to the idea of a party-movement structured from the ground up in what we later called circles.

Unlike other sectors of the left, Anticapitalistas, just as it was one of the few organisations that did not distrust the 15M movement, was the first to consider the need and possibility of taking a political leap because it believed that this political initiative would not put a brake on the mobilisation, which, incidentally, was already showing signs of exhaustion as a result of the State's blockade and the recovery of certain initiatives by the parties of the regime, which were beginning to emerge from their initial bewilderment and paralysis in the face of such a widespread and unexpected protest. On the contrary, Anticapitalistas considered it both urgent and possible to channel all the energy generated after the 15M movement into a new battle that would unlock a political landscape that was objectively padlocked. Indeed, there was considerable potential in the unrepresented social and political sector. In this respect, Anticapitalistas had the great foresight and tactical audacity to promote the Podemos initiative, whose scope and nature were so significant that they would test all the organisation's strengths and capabilities.

What would have happened if Anticapitalistas hadn't taken the initiative? We can't know because it didn't happen. What we do know is that the radical left-wing groups that didn't align themselves with Podemos committed political suicide with the noose of sectarianism. It's possible that Anticapitalistas would have followed the path of political insignificance into which many of the groups that remained outside of Podemos fell. It probably wouldn't have multiplied its militant forces and wouldn't have enjoyed the broad audience its public spokespeople have garnered. It wouldn't have extended its organisation to all the autonomous communities. It wouldn't have been able to organise massive political events, both in person and the online ones it held during the Covid-19 pandemic. None of its proposals on the national question or on social inequality would have had the media impact they did. It wouldn't have been able to set the political agenda among the vanguard, nor would it have become an ideological and political touchstone for the more politically aware sectors of activism. It wouldn't have been able to carry out its work within local, regional, and European institutions from an anti-austerity and democratic perspective in favour of the working class. At this point, it's worth noting that Pablo Iglesias and his team very quickly obstructed, through the abuse of anti-democratic regulations, the possibility of anti-capitalist representation in the national Parliament, where they had a limited presence and only for one term.

However these and other issues that Anticapitalistas has to its credit cannot hide two points: 1) The already mentioned fact that the Podemos project failed and that Anticapitalistas' theses were defeated; 2) that important errors have been made by Anticapitalistas in the process that have helped the triumph of Pablo Iglesias' positions. Therefore, it is worth remembering/critically reconstructing the story of Podemos' history and taking stock of the steps taken by Anticapitalistas in order to have an overall view and also be able to understand the other big decision: that of leaving Podemos and promoting Anticapitalistas as a new political subject.

The Podemos phenomenon in all its complexity

The first characteristic of Podemos is that it captured the feeling of indignation that existed after the 2008 crisis and the widespread social perception that a minority benefited because a majority lost a great deal. And that this social issue is intimately linked to the democratic question. On November 22, 2014, at his most radicalised moment, when polls showed Podemos as the leading political force, Pablo Iglesias, using distinctly populist left-wing language but functional for the positions of the revolutionary left, stated that: “The fault line now pits those who, like us, defend democracy (...) against those who are on the side of the elites, the banks, the market; there are those at the bottom and those at the top (...), an elite and the majority.”

A second unique characteristic of the birth of this political formation is the relevant and decisive role played by a small but active revolutionary Marxist organisation, Anticapitalistas, in the creation and first stage of development of Podemos. Both the founding document, “Making a Move: Turning Indignation into Political Change,” and the electoral programme for the 2014 European Parliament elections reflect, despite the inevitable shifts in language when various cultures converge, the hegemony of revolutionary Marxist approaches in the meetings and assemblies of activists. Likewise, the support of Anticapitalistas was essential in other areas: legitimising the electoral proposal within the social left, providing initial financial resources, making its small organisational structure available to the project, and promoting grassroots membership, the local groups known as circles, throughout almost all of the Spanish state.

The third characteristic is that Podemos was born as a party extremely open to incorporating diverse currents of the social and political left. This soon materialised in the inclusion of sectors that had broken with IU, which was unable to overcome its internal crisis and offer alternatives to the demands of a new generation of activists. It also generated interest among social movements, particularly those focused on political ecology and feminism. And it captured the attention of the politically disengaged generation in their twenties.

There were three essential conditions for the Podemos project to be built and to be useful: that it maintain its radical discourse; that it establish stable organic ties with the most politically aware and combative working-class and popular sectors; and that it be internally structured democratically to enable deliberation, membership participation in decision-making, and the creative and fraternal coexistence of the broad ideological and political plurality present within its ranks from the outset. This plurality encompassed a wide range of aspects, with a broader spectrum of differences than that presented by its three main political components grouped around the figure of Pablo Iglesias, Íñigo Errejón and Anticapitalistas, whose best-known public spokespeople were Teresa Rodríguez and Miguel Urbán.

From its inception, Podemos became an internal battleground between its three factions. The one represented by the anti-capitalist current—broader than the organisation that supported it—proclaimed the importance of programme and organisation in the collective construction of the new party, as well as the need to promote self-organisation and social mobilisation, its establishment among the working people, and the combination of these tasks with a gradual accumulation of electoral and institutional support that should be placed at the service of these objectives through a two-way relationship between the party and the working people.

In response to this proposal, an alliance was formed between the populist left-wing faction of Íñigo Errejón and the faction of Pablo Iglesias at Podemos' first citizens' assembly, known as Vista Alegre I (named after the venue). This alliance materialised in the creation of a bureaucratic clique composed of two factions, constantly reshuffling according to the internal balance of power, whose mission was to achieve absolute control of Podemos. The alliance's short-term objective was to defeat revolutionary Marxist positions.

Pablo Iglesias's specific objective was to establish himself as the undisputed leader with complete autonomy, without outlining any project other than to overtake the Socialist Party electorally and quickly assume power. To achieve this, he did not hesitate to radicalise or moderate his discourse as needed. He never proposed a societal vision, a

government programme, or a strategy to follow, nor did he consider the conditions and measures necessary to confront the attacks of capital. Nor were lessons learned from the Troika's intervention in the Greek case of Syriza. The old reformist confusion between gaining access to government and wielding power was repeated, albeit with radical rhetoric that resonated with the prevailing spirit of protest. All of their political action, with its more or less leftist discourse, has been characterised by the exercise of hyper-personal leadership in a simplistic imitation of the less interesting aspects of the Bolivarian experience, but also by what we might call a programmatic relativism that allows them to pull proposals from a drawer and discard them according to the tactical convenience of the moment, without any relation whatsoever to a societal project or a strategy for achieving it. The strategic hypothesis was "we were born to govern"; that is, gaining access to government as an end in itself.

In this task, Iglesias found during an initial stage a very functional ally in Errejón, a follower at that time of the theses of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe [2] on the total autonomy of the political and the denial of the role played by social classes and economic disputes for Marxists in the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, from this sector, speeches and even press articles were filled with abstract disquisitions on the construction of the subject people through the creation of an ideologically transversal interclass electoral base around the mobilisation of feelings for a leader capable of confronting the people with a meager oligarchic minority. This entailed accepting the inappropriateness of the categories left and right, or of class analyses, and so on. Errejón theorised the possibility of a quick electoral victory, to which everything had to be subordinated: efficiency versus democracy, hierarchy versus grassroots organisation in local groups, electoral war machine (a literal expression) versus mass party, plebiscitary participation versus democratic deliberation. After the clique's first internal victory, the local groups lost their decision-making power, and leadership elections were held independently, through online voting by registered members via a form on the website. This was the sole commitment of membership. Elections were held without debate and were highly personalistic. This approach was completely antithetical to both a militant party and an organised mass party. Therefore, it was impossible for the rank and file to control and remove the leaders.

These theorisations did not lead to a quality theoretical and ideological debate in either academic or political circles, beyond what could be carried out by a minority deeply involved in the construction of Podemos, whether they held one position or another, or in the defense of the two-party establishment. The 2015 and 2016 Spanish parliamentary elections, while representing a significant result for Podemos, did not bring about the long-awaited overtaking of the ruling parties. Electoral decline began alongside a search for votes by abandoning any radicalism. The populist moment—Laclauian in its popularisation in the Spanish state by Chantal Mouffe in the leading national newspaper, *El País*—was reduced to a mere populist fad. [3] The ballot box reduced the theorising to ashes.

At the following congress, *Vista Alegre II*, Iglesias's faction shifted to the left and purged Errejón's faction. The clash between these two bureaucratic apparatuses for control of the party expressed what Jaime Pastor and I described as "Pablo Iglesias vs. Íñigo Errejón: between revived Eurocommunism and centrist neopopulism". [4] According to assessments such as Emmanuel Rodríguez's, the clash was yet another expression of Podemos' ideology and conception of politics as merely the generation of elites, the struggle between them, and the fulfillment of the aspirations of the university-educated members of a progressive middle class with no future. [5] The level of sectarian conflict between the two factions of the former allies, played out in the press and on social media prior to the second citizens' assembly, jeopardised its very existence. Despite the generally chaotic atmosphere, the congress went ahead thanks to the efforts and level-headedness of the Anticapitalistas, as described in his report by journalist Raúl Solís, who is not particularly sympathetic to revolutionary Marxism. He expressed surprise that the revolutionary Marxist left had adopted a sensible stance [*sic*]. [6] For a few months, Pablo Iglesias's shift to the left benefited the Anticapitalistas faction. But Iglesias attacked pluralism. First, he marginalised Errejón, the true Epimetheus of this story, who, when he belatedly discovered the kind of party Iglesias had designed and saw what was emerging from Podemos's Pandora's box, decided to break away for political reasons, but above all because he couldn't breathe in an organisation without democracy. Immediately afterward, the purging of Anticapitalistas began, using bureaucratic measures.

Very soon an evolution began, with turns to the right and left, of Pablo Iglesias towards his youthful conceptions of Eurocommunist origin; he even carried out the rehabilitation of the memory of Santiago Carrillo, the leader of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) who together with Enrico Berlinguer, of the Italian Communist Party, and Georges Marchais, of the French Communist Party, were the fathers of Eurocommunism, the new way (as they themselves called it) of achieving access to government through the parliamentary system. Iglesias began to extol the virtues of the Spanish Constitution as a social and democratic shield, as if it could be dismembered and each article had no connection to the others or any logic of legitimising the post-Franco liberal regime. On a key issue, as analysed in other articles in *viento sur*, the focus shifted from challenging the Constitution to advocating for its partial reform "when possible."

While Pablo Iglesias used Laclau's conceptual framework in his speeches, he was probably not a dedicated disciple, but rather a beneficiary. The post-Marxist intellectual's theories meshed well with the electoral path to power and with Iglesias's preeminent role in the process. Abstract appeals to democracy as the tool to transform society within the framework of liberal democratic institutions—which are not questioned—lead to the impotence of left-wing populism and Eurocommunism to govern by substantially and lastingly improving people's living conditions in a situation of economic crisis; even less so to transform society. Stathis Kouvelakis is right to criticise Laclau because his concept of radical democracy, which excludes a break with the capitalist socioeconomic order and with the principles of liberal democracy, implies a self-limitation. And he reminds us that, contrary to Laclau's assertion, it is the class struggle that acts as the "agent of reification of the political subject", not so-called "populist reason". [7]

In each subsequent election, including the 2019 election in which Pablo Iglesias led the Podemos-IU alliance known as Unidas Podemos (UP), the loss of votes and seats was constant and overwhelming. Their influence and media presence declined; Podemos no longer set the political agenda or the topics of public debate, and the organisation's prestige—which was very high in its early days—fell in every opinion poll. And so began the desperate search for more traditional left-wing and center-left spaces in pursuit of the missing vote. Más País (MP or More Country), the splinter group led by Íñigo Errejón, would suffer the same fate.

While Podemos initially attracted considerable attention with its challenging yet victorious rhetoric, election results transformed that initial momentum into a stark and pragmatic "we were born to govern." This shift was facilitated by the political decline of United Left (IU) following the triumph of its pro-government stance and its increasing subordination to Podemos. Unidas Podemos (UP) has abandoned any pretense of maintaining its own distinct left-wing profile, symbolically manifested in its united front in support of Nadia Calviño, both in the EU and in practice south of the Pyrenees.

The weaknesses and errors of Anticapitalistas

The outcome of the reformist/revolutionary confrontation within Podemos was not guaranteed beforehand, but alongside the difficulties of carrying out an anti-capitalist policy within and from Podemos, real possibilities existed. This required stepping outside the comfort zone in which so many small groups and sects of the radical left settle, confining their activity to self-organisation, denunciation, and challenges to other political actors, and to propaganda without the will or capacity to design political projects for and in relation to mass action. Anticapitalistas took a bold gamble, showed audacity, and deployed its programmatic and tactical potential.

The task was Herculean: to build a mass party from scratch in a situation of social crisis, but with little culture or tradition of organised activism. This occurred within a context of crisis for the political regime—given the disaffection of young people and the scale of the Catalan conflict with the central government—but with the post-Francoist state apparatus intact, without any cracks. With a crisis in the two-party system leading to a situation of ungovernability, but with a stabilising Socialist Party that maintained the trust, albeit diminished, of the left-wing electorate... Under these conditions, building an alternative was a difficult task. The factors that explained the window of opportunity for

the creation of Podemos could also become its Achilles' heel; for example, the years of destruction and regression of the workers' movement's consciousness and the collapse of the reformist and revolutionary political left; but, above all, the fact that the organic crisis had not yet occurred. All of this objectively hindered the success of the Anticapitalistas' project to make Podemos a lever for emancipation..

However, it is important to highlight some errors and weaknesses that, apart from the objective difficulties, hampered Anticapitalistas. A primary mistake was the de facto acceptance of the narrow framework imposed by the clique through the secretive and underhanded legalisation of anti-democratic and hierarchical statutes that granted legal ownership to Iglesias's team. This was an attempt to conceal Anticapitalistas' identity as a founding political entity and to portray its members as external conspirators, infiltrators, and enemies of the project (sic) that they themselves had created! The reader may recall the photograph of Lenin and Trotsky's rally, the image of which was censored and altered by Stalin in a display of photographic magic to erase memory and appropriate the revolution. Something similar happened in Podemos. How can we characterise this attitude of Anticapitalistas? Today, only one term fits: irresponsible naive trust.

There was a voluntaristic overestimation of the capacity for action of our modest organised militant forces, not so much to structure the initial spontaneous and massive response of the activists, but in the face of the hyper-leaderships constructed in the media and the plebiscitary link existing (and fostered) between the charismatic leader and the masses when there is no process of deep politicisation, of training of cadres, of systematic structuring of membership and of organic relationship with broad sectors of left-wing people, and yet there is a deep feeling of need for change and for new directions and new representatives. This factor was key to the level of autonomy that Pablo Iglesias achieved in his role as General Secretary – who is elected independently of the rest of the leadership in a plebiscite-like manner – to impose his dynamics on Podemos, sideline any proposal for democratic structuring, and justify all kinds of political shifts according to his interests in each situation.

These were the times when Podemos set up what Santiago Alba called the "media command" which, for a short period of time, effectively revolutionised political communication both on social networks and in its relationship with audiovisual media. That partisan apparatus was exclusively appropriated by the Iglesias-Errejón tandem. In contrast, Anticapitalistas—given that access to Podemos's common ground was denied to them by the bureaucratic clique—failed to organise even a rudimentary communication system, however modest, that would have allowed them to express their positions autonomously in the media and on social networks. This has long been one of the heaviest burdens hindering their activity.

Neocaudillismo in the Spanish State was ideologically, politically and organisationally inspired by the Latin American populist experiences that are now in decline, but the leadership of Podemos defended its "conjunctural" and "instrumental" necessity – pretending to do so against its will – with the mantra of its convenience and opportunity in the face of the "electoral and communicational logic in the society of the 21st century". The next problem, linked to the previous one that Anticapitalistas did not detect in time, is that this caudillismo connected very well with sectors coming from post-Stalinist experiences and with the most depoliticised, who readily accepted the hierarchical organisation in which many of them began to call themselves soldiers.

This rapid process of bureaucratisation was facilitated because some sectors of left-wing activists within social movements, lacking sufficient political awareness, initially looked down on Podemos, and the anti-capitalist sector could not count on their support at a crucial moment. Following the new party's electoral success, they flocked to it blindly, like moths to a flame. It was too late to reform the organisation in a democratic way. Lacking political direction, some settled into the new situation, others simply sought employment in the institutional interstices, and the majority left Podemos along with a large portion of those who had joined.

In that situation, Anticapitalistas made a mistake at Vista Alegre I. Since the framework of the dispute was centered

on the organisational model, it focused its efforts almost exclusively on responding to the internal democratic question, a really important matter, but without raising the battle for a political project with enough energy to have brought together the existing currents of radicalisation within the Anticapitalistas environment. Lesson from then and for the future: establishing the relationship between political project and aspiration to an ecosocialist and feminist society is the sine qua non condition for building the strategic political groupings that must have a horizon of post-capitalist society. Only in this way can an antagonistic historical bloc be created and unified. Anticapitalistas failed to place this issue at the heart of Podemos's construction, which allowed the Podemos leadership to manoeuvre and change political positions at will, thus defining objectives according to its immediate interests.

But the fundamental issue is that if the task was Herculean, Anticapitalistas not only had a deficit in its numerical size, but also in its social implantation and, even more importantly, in the degree of political cohesion it had before undertaking the project proposed by the party leadership. Therefore, there were defections from a less audacious, more sectarian and leftist sector that soon ceased to exist. But there were also losses within a sector that reduced its expectations to electoral politics and ceased to see the need for a revolutionary Marxist organisation within a broader framework.

The leadership of Anticapitalistas astutely analysed the circumstances that led to the decision to found Podemos, but they failed to grasp the political requirements for undertaking such a leap. From this, and with post-Podemos tasks in mind, a lesson can be learned: the necessity of significant ideological and strategic party preparation prior to embarking on decisions of this magnitude. But since situations that will present new windows of opportunity allowing for qualitative leaps cannot be magically guessed or scientifically predicted, it is essential to consciously and deliberately create a higher level of internal party consistency than that which occurs spontaneously and routinely. This should be a constant central task that will be very useful for acting in unison, with strategic thinking, tactical ingenuity and organisational creativity, so that opportunities and possibilities are transformed into strengths and realities.

We'll see each other in the struggles

As Raúl Camargo explained in an interview [\[8\]](#), there are two underlying reasons for Anticapitalistas' departure from Podemos. On the one hand, the lack of internal democratic life in an organisation whose bodies rarely meet or deliberate, and where proportionality is not respected for the election of internal leadership positions or in the electoral candidacies decided by the general secretary: these are all factors that prevent the development of a pluralistic organic life. Furthermore, because the process of accepting the constitutional framework of the 1978 regime and of flexible adaptation to the market economy by Iglesias' team has been accompanied by a rapprochement with the PSOE, this has culminated in the formation of a joint government in which UP plays a subordinate and secondary role.

The budgetary agreements between Podemos and the PSOE, as well as the coalition government's programme, have been subordinated to the requirements of the Stability and Growth Pact. This is a government that, under the hegemony and close supervision of Minister Nadia Calviño, has an economic and social policy determined by the limits imposed at any given time by the European Commission, the Council, the Eurogroup, or the European Central Bank. The social conscience that inspires Podemos is undeniable, but its proposals, as demonstrated during the pandemic, have a limited scope. Measures to protect the most vulnerable are necessary as palliatives but insufficient; labour-related measures have an expiration date and favour further indebtedness of the state coffers and relief for corporate profits.

In the brief experience of the so-called progressive government, Podemos has made a torrent of concessions, even abandoning points in the programme agreed upon with the PSOE, and has silently accepted significant political setbacks and economic decisions. One of the next tests will be its stance on the blatant crisis of the monarchy, which

will not be resolved solely through pronouncements in Parliament.

It is of little use to regroup the people, appeal to the interests of the people, have an electoral presence or be part of a government if it is not around a project that puts an end to their alienation. This, all the more, compels us to remember categories such as social class and exploitation; to conceive of the social majority not as an arithmetic sum of individuals but as an algebraic aggregate of the working class with all social sectors that have outstanding issues with the system and are capable of forming a new hegemonic bloc. That is, to conceive of the people as a real political subject, an antagonist, and a candidate for power in every sense. This is quite different from limiting their progress to the mere occupation of a few marginal ministerial portfolios by a new elite of young, professionalised politicians.

Podemos has become a plebiscitary electoral machine that, while representing a portion of the left, albeit in a diminishing way, is an impediment to the development of popular self-organisation. On the one hand, because its leadership has reduced political struggle to the purely institutional; on the other, because it maintains an instrumental relationship with social organisations. This is complementary and functional with Iglesias's governing orientation, characterised by governing at all costs, in order to insert himself into the progressive management structure of the State apparatus, limiting the work agenda to possibilist criteria and renouncing the objective of the transformation of the political, economic and social system; constantly assuming the logic of the lesser evil, as can be verified at this moment in the management of the post-Covid-19 social crisis.

In short, the current picture of Podemos is that of a hierarchical party whose governing bodies are lifeless, identified with the parliamentary group and with the members of the government, a party that has almost completely lost its militant base – those who joined at its inception – and that has reduced its political action to an institutional presence devoid of transformative ideas and proposals. And its main focus of reflection is its place within the state structure and the vicissitudes of Podemos itself. A party that, according to Antonio Gramsci's classification in his Brief Notes on Machiavelli's Politics, is dedicated to "small politics," to "the partial and everyday questions that arise within a structure already established by the struggles for preeminence between the various factions of the same political class." And it has abandoned "grand politics," the kind that truly "deals with matters of state and social transformations." And it has fallen into the error—already warned against by Gramsci—of allowing "every element of petty politics" to become "a matter of grand politics."

This is not good news. The current political situation does not favour left-wing positions, presenting significant difficulties and challenges in the absence of a mass party. However, this observation cannot overshadow the positive aspects mentioned above that Anticapitalistas has gained from this experience, which allows the revolutionary Marxist organisation to continue playing, as Brais Fernández argues [9], an active role in the crisis of the 1978 regime. To achieve this, it must promote new political and social alliances against austerity policies, continue working towards the creation of new anti-neoliberal groups with mass influence, such as Adelante Andalucía, promote the organisation of trade union, social, environmental, feminist and youth struggles and in defense of the public sector, and be an ideological and cultural reference point in the existing debates to define a new ecofeminist and social project.

9 September 2020

New translation by David Fagan from [Vientosur](#), replacing that originally posted in 2020.

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing

The Rise and Fall of Podemos: Reasons for a Farewell

functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.

[1] Izquierda Anticapitalista (Anticapitalist Left) participated in the creation of Podemos during 2013 and 2014 and later changed its name to Anticapitalistas (Anticapitalists). Given the complete political and organisational continuity between the two names, I use the name Anticapitalistas throughout this article for my own convenience and to facilitate reading. For more information on this formal transition, see <https://vientosur.info/spip.php?article9779>

[2] Suddenly, for a short time, bookstore windows were filled with works by Laclau such as “On Populist Reason”, “Hegemony and Socialist Strategy” by Laclau and Mouffe, and “Building a People: Hegemony and the Radicalization of Democracy” by Mouffe and Errejón. What I don’t know is whether they were actually successful with readers.

[3] https://elpais.com/elpais/2016/06/06/opinion/1465228236_594864.html

[4] <https://vientosur.info/spip.php?article14555>

[5] <https://vientosur.info/El-podemismo-como-problema-y-como-ideologia>

[6] http://www.huffingtonpost.es/raul-solis-/la-cordura-de-los-anticap_b_14635506.html?ncid=engmodushpimg00000009

[7] <https://www.vientosur.info/spip.php?article14995>

[8] https://www.eldiario.es/politica/raul-camargo-podemos-gobierno-psoe_1_5963428.html

[9] <https://vientosur.info/Y-despues-de-Covid19-que-hacemos-Notas-para-una-discusion-en-la-izquierda>