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Spanish State

Vista Alegre II: The show is over, are the politics starting?

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Much, much noise, noise of windows,

Nests of apples that end up rotting.

Much, much noise, so much, so much noise

So much noise and at the end finally the end

So much noise and at the end...

Joaquin Sabina

Vista Alegre II has ended. After the deafening noise, the end has come. To analyse the causes of an unexpected result and to suggest some lines for future action, when spectacle and psychodrama give way to politics, here are five immediate thoughts on the second Citizens' Assembly of Podemos:

1. The internal process that led to the renewal of the leadership in Madrid was to a great extent repeated and extended here. In Madrid, the relationship of forces was more favourable to Errejonismo [1] which, had it won there, would have been seen as unstoppable at the state-wide Congress. The tactic adopted in Madrid by Anticapitalistas, creating Reinicia Podemos together with the "Pablist" current was based on the assumption that we need to renounce to some visibility and our own space in order to gain time and I think we made the right decision.

The most urgent task then was to prevent the more institutionalist and moderate theses from becoming hegemonic. This process showed that support for Pablo Iglesias was stronger than was thought in popular layers and that among Podemos supporters this sector is strong even in a primarily urban environment. The result for Madrid, taking as reference the average for the list, was not as tight as was believed: 51% for Juntas Podemos (pro-Iglesias + Anticapitalistas) as against 39% for Errejon's supporters. There were already signs that this situation could be replicated at Vista Alegre II, taking into account the weight of Madrid within Podemos.

Errejon's sector did not evaluate things in the same way, and threw everything into the state assembly. Hence the error that led them to suffer a considerable setback: overestimating the virtual relationship, and social networks, as against the identification and size of the greater part of the body attached to Podemos with the figure of Pablo. In this sense, the populist relationship with the rank and file held, paradoxically, much better for Iglesias than Errejon. [2]

2. The whole stark dispute that has surrounded this Assembly had to do with a political culture very much determined by the model of Vista Alegre I: public competition to win an electorate that was non-activist and was to be reached by the media and networks. As positions of responsibility are distributed according to these parameters, appearing in the media and accumulating followers in networks becomes one of the essential features of any applicant. The whole culture of Podemos is impregnated by that maxim, which ends up conferring on communication and its derivatives the only measure of political action. So the communications media becomes the setting for all internal debates, instead of the local circles of Podemos whose role in the stage that is ending has been almost symbolic. With the additional excesses of a struggle for control of the project, the elements that have seasoned the spectacle of the last

few weeks were already there for two and a half years at least.

3. Pabloism [3] has consolidated its position as the current with full control of the state-wide apparatus of Podemos. They have a popular base for improving and extending the implantation of the organisation, but on the other hand, they must apply formulas of decentralization that their organizational document ignores or rejects. Beyond a State Citizen's Council where they count on an absolute majority, the main counterweights in this period will come from the territories. Hopefully, however, they will know how to integrate and build a collective leadership which has until now been absent, and the leadership bodies will serve to deliberate and translate in an orderly manner debates to all the activists and the circles.

4. Errejón's sector has burned many boats in this battle. Abuse of both the adjective "winning" and the verb "win" when you lose one internal process after another can end up creating estrangement among outsiders and frustration among your own supporters. The Errejón project underestimated the accumulated weight of the social and political traditions of the past and present in this country, and his application of Laclau's theories to a region in the south of Europe has not worked well. This is not a country in Latin America. The populist hypothesis introduced interesting innovations on the use of discourse but moved it very far from effective material relations, which has ended up making a lot of noise with little practical result. They will need to outline their current beyond permanent sloganeering and Twitter campaigning. These are necessary of course but they would do well to review some of the precepts that led them to consider everyone else to be losers and outdated compared to their infallible transversality.

5. And, last but not least, Podemos en Movimiento and Anticapitalistas. The decision to present a space of their own has been a success, but this was not obvious after the results in Madrid and Andalusia. A risky decision, where we ceded space in order to gain visibility, which was fundamental in order to project a third sector which was radical and based on the movements, but sensible and reasonable. A crop whose harvest will be deferred, in contrast to the model adopted for Vista Alegre I when the pressure to win at all costs was growing. The list was superb, the campaign also, and only a system as unfair as it is petty left us with two representatives when we could have had nine or ten with any proportional system. One of the lessons of 15-M is that you cannot say one thing and do another. We cannot criticise the Spanish electoral system and have an internal system which is much less democratic. If this method was applied in the national assembly, Podemos would have less than half the deputies it currently has.

After this congress, Anticapitalistas can celebrate a good campaign, where team spirit has been displayed, opposing views have been respected, and loyalty to the Podemos project has resulted in a "moral victory" – as has been pointed out by various media outlets. This slow accumulation of legitimacy will undoubtedly be useful for what is to come. Encouraging a new cycle of mobilisations will be one of the essential collective tasks we must deal with, and for this the relations Podemos en Movimiento and Anticapitalistas have with the social movements will be key.

Madrid, 14 February 2017

[1] The current around Álex Errejón. Errejón had previously been number 2 to Podemos's General Secretary, Pablo Iglesias, but political differences between them had become more apparent over the last few months and they put different proposals to this Assembly.

[2] See Dave Kellaway in *Socialist Resistance* "[Podemos votes against a moderate turn at Vista Alegre II](#)": "[Errejón's] political document received 33.7% against 56% for Iglesias and 9% for the ACs, there was similar vote on the Organisational, the Ethics and the Equalities documents. On what became the crucial contest – the vote on the leadership slates – Iglesias won 60% of the seats to Errejón's 37%." We can add that Anticapitalistas won 13% in that latter vote.

[3] The current of Pablo Iglesias.