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Catalonia

# Ada Colau remains mayor of Barcelona

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**Ada Colau of Barcelona en Comú (BComú) remains mayor of Barcelona thanks to the promise of a pact with the PSC (Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya) whose content is not yet known but which will involve a distribution of power in the town hall, and three votes of the Barcelona pel Canvi-Ciutadans group, led by Manuel Valls. This article analyses how this situation came about, how other possible solutions have been ruled out and what the possible consequences are. [1]**

A tripartite arrangement with the ten Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, (ERC, Republican Left) councillors plus the ten of Bcomu and 8 of the PSC would have given an absolute majority of 28 out of 41 councillors. But it became apparent very quickly that this was not feasible because the other two parties rejected it. This left three options, reaching an agreement with just the ERC, reaching an agreement with the PSC alone or going into opposition.

There was no clear discussion of these options. The debate was held in a BComú plenary a week before the deadline, in an assembly of 450 activists which agreed to what the leadership proposed: that is to present Ada as mayor in order to be stronger in the negotiations. Only that formula could be put to a vote, with a yes or no in the assembly, without even the option of abstaining.

Thus, other options were eliminated, and the necessary open debate was impossible. The leadership claimed they were seeking a tripartite agreement and that the risks of going into opposition were debated, but nothing could be further from reality. The same people who said this later recognized that opposition was never an option, the only important thing was to be in government, and preferably with the PSC. That is, we discussed whether we wanted Ada to be mayor or not in the abstract (obviously it is normal for everyone in BComú to want this), but what should have been discussed in the assembly was if we wanted to agree with the ERC, with the PSC, or go into opposition if there was no tripartite agreement. This was not allowed.

Then, no further debate was possible: you could only vote whether you wanted the pact with the PSC or with the ERC, because this is what the leadership decided would go to a referendum among those registered; those who have registered on the web, but who do not participate in activities or meetings. The statutes have established two forms of decision making, some things are decided by 500 activists and others by 9,000 registered people. The leadership campaigned all out for a single position, that of the pact with the PSC, without even mentioning in the question that this also involved the support of Manuel Valls, who guaranteed three votes of support to Ada (of the six councillors of Barcelona pel Canvi-Ciutadans) to reach 21 of the absolute majority. So, the debate left much to be desired in terms of a new politics and radical democracy, since the option chosen days ago by the leadership was only one: to have power and the post of mayor.

It was not possible to meet or discuss programmatic content of the discussions with the PSC. No comparisons were made of the ERC and PSC programs. The BComú program has much more in common with that of ERC. This is true over the environment, waste, mobility and public transport, the commitment that 30 per cent of new housing will be affordable social housing, the creation of a public funeral service, the possibility of municipalizing water and more.

But it is true that, when governing in the Catalan Parliament, the Generalitat with Junts per Catalunya (JuntsxCat, Together for Catalonia), the practice of ERC across the whole of Catalonia was very much criticized on several issues, such as the over Guaranteed Citizens' Income; not paying the promised €664 for thousands of applicants who have no income. It is also true that in the past four years the political attitude of ERC has not been collaborative. At the same time, the neoliberal reality of the state government of the PSOE, without repealing the Mordaza law, or

the employment reform of the PP, and many other things, meant that in Madrid, in the Congress of Deputies, the ERC and Unidos Podemos voted together much more than with the PSOE. [2] In Barcelona, the rupture between BComÀ and the PSC government occurred when article 155 was applied to Catalonia and the PSC supported the repression, but there were also differences on issues such as the municipalization of water, now in the hands of the multinational Agbar, whose lobby has close links with some members of the PSOE. [3]

Remember that ERC won the municipal elections in the city of Barcelona with 5,000 votes more than BComÀ, and that it is very different to decide to addition votes with the PSC to prevent Albiol of the conservative People's Party becoming mayor of Badalona, than to agree with PSC and not with ERC in Barcelona. The ERC has not been involved in any cases of corruption and is as much or more to the left than the PSC, and we have seen in practice how the PSC has included in its electoral lists the people of the ex- Democratic Union of Catalonia of Duran Lleida. On the other hand, the current law makes municipalities very presidential and not very republican, and the mayor's office is key, since many decisions and appointments must be made through it.

But the negotiations with ERC could have allowed creating the position of deputy mayor, delegating powers of the mayor to the government commission, where they would be tied to 10 councillors and avoid arbitrariness or gestures from the PSC's Maragall. The agreement could include distributing everything to the maximum and ample freedom for Ada, sharing 50 per cent of the presence at institutional events or in the media, or that she would always inaugurate what had begun during her term of office, having a voice on national themes and raising Catalan sovereignty with confederal fraternity and so on. In the end, there was no debate or vote on what ERC offered at the last minute, two years of mayoralty for Ada and two for Maragall.

The benefits of having the mayor's office are totally clear but I do not support the idea of having the mayor's office at any price; a large part of the electorate will pay a heavy price for this manoeuvre. Of course, as always on the old left, for now there is no self-criticism for having lost votes and a councillor; the analysis is closed with a shallow "we have resisted the state pull of the PSOE".

On the other hand, it is not true that to agree with PSC is avoiding the logic of blocs. The PSC is part of a block, that of Article 155 which defends the monarchical regime of 1978. [4] A pact with ERC would be better from at this point of view, since it would at least favour the disengagement of the latter from the current Catalan right of the JuntsxCat in the Generalitat; a JuntsxCat still dominated by the ex-Convergence, now Partit Democràtic Europeu Català (PDeCAT, Catalan European Democratic Party. It would have been an example that would project throughout Catalonia, demonstrating that the Comunes could unite most leftwing voters, from the PSC and ERC, to have a mandate with each.

No matter how fraudulent the institutional procedures of Puigdemont and Junqueras may be, we cannot deny that we are facing an abuse of authority and intolerable violence on the part of the state, and, let's face it, the same thing would happen tomorrow to communists or to Podemos if they obtained 60 per cent in a regional Parliament and disobeyed any law to bring greater social justice in the face of growing inequality imposed by European capitalism. [5] ] A referendum on taxes on the banks, or on a better minimum wage in Catalonia or on measures for an effective right to housing, when what is voted on is not within the competence of the "autonomous" government, are acts of disobedience that can accumulate forces to change the system and which we cannot give up practicing. We see other struggles where the idea of direct democracy also predominates, such as the demand of the *gilets jaunes* in France, where they state that proposals for legislation can be made by popular assemblies and that they must be voted on and the result observed. The judgment of the referendum trial held in Catalonia on 1 October will be released in the coming months and when it comes out, it will always be preferable to be on the side of the repressed rather than the 155 jailers.

All options always have risks and the worst thing about ERC is its electoral list, starting with Maragall. This is not

because he is 75 years old and has been a political full-timer for 40 years, but because his was the worst stage of the PSC in Barcelona City Council when – during the previous Tripartite of Catalonia with Montilla (PSC-ERC-ICV) – he, as minister of education, introduced a teaching law, the LEC, which provoked big unitary mobilizations. In the end he guaranteed subsidies to private education by law, even those segregated by gender, like the Opus Dei schools. [6] But we must remember that some people left Catalunya en Comú a few months ago to join the ERC lists: Joan Josep Nuet of Esquerra Unida i Alternativa (EUiA, United and Alternative Left) – now only of Comunistes.Cat – was presented by ERC in the state-wide elections and Elisenda Alemany, of Sobiranistes, was second on the ERC municipal list. [7]

It is worrying that in the left debate on these coalitions, the issue of moving into opposition is always omitted, together with the essential debate about building and creating popular unity. It is necessary to debate how to create unitary and democratic organization everywhere, how to involve activists in making all social movements expand and develop so that we have some day a correlation of forces that can change the monarchical and neoliberal regime, with a daily praxis that creates another hegemonic culture, based on solidarity and community against consumerism and individualism.

The practical result of this phrase of one foot inside and one hundred feet outside the institutions has been a disaster; we are assimilated by the institution because it is prioritized over political organization and the sad reality of our demobilization forces us into this debate. In a metropolis of 2 million people we cannot be only five thousand demonstrators, when a demonstration is called to demand from the PSOE that rents are limited, or to repeal the gag law, while we have no prospect of general strikes against the reduction of wages after 10 years of crisis, and the urgent environmental struggle begins with a few young people and is so limited. This is the main thing that needs to be debated on the left.

The absence of these debates is highly significant, our daily practice in society and in the neighbourhood is not analysed, and when there is a possibility of institutional power, we too often forget what is important. We are reduced to digital voting, to some very oriented questions, where it seems that the decision is made to feel Spanish or Catalan, never knowing what it means to be federalist or what competencies should be decentralized, or worse, we vote for a new kind of leader worship in the case of Ada.

The effects of accepting the votes of Valls and Cs was not debated, nor is how we should fight for the right to decide our future as Catalans, which has widespread (almost 8 per cent) support. Nobody knows how the people of Barcelona in Comú and Podemos will fight for an amnesty for prisoners, all of them, both political prisoners and those repressed for social struggles, but in September-October there will be a bigger general strike. The last general strike, called by a single pro-independence union in Catalonia, on 21 February 2019, was much bigger than that called on 8 March for genuine equality for women.

The final result of the digital voting was 70 per cent in favour of the pact with the PSC and about 30 per cent of the pact with ERC, with a 40 per cent participation (4,040 people). The BComú leadership called a rally in Plaza Sant Jaume to support Ada as mayor with banners, but it was obscured by a mass of pro-independence people fighting for the freedom of political prisoners, who screamed at Ada and shouted “Not with Valls”, while the PSOE and Pedro Sánchez had to listen to “Not with Rivera”.

The result is that the two opposing blocs will continue, just what was not wanted, and that BComú is positioned first and foremost next to a bloc, despite saying again and again that Ada is neither pro nor anti-independence. In short, a socialist republicanism remains to be built, both socially and nationally

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[1] Barcelona en Comú is a “citizens’ platform” launched in 2014. Ada Colau, an anti-evictions activist, headed the list in the city elections in 2015. The PSC is a Catalan social democratic party federated to the Spanish socialist party PSOE. Manuel Valls, a dual national, former French prime minister in the Socialist Party government of François Hollande 2014-16, entered Catalan politics in 2018. He formed a local party Barcelona pel Canvi which stood in the elections in coalition with the rightwing Ciutadans (Cs) party which together won 6 council places.

[2] The Mordaza law is also used as the gag law because it attacks the right to protest.

[3] Article 155 of the constitution of the Spanish state allows the federal government to reassert control over an autonomous region, see “[Some quick notes on the outcome of the Catalan elections](#)”.

[4] The Madrid government invoked Article 155 to dismiss the government of Catalonia led by Puigdemont in October 2017.

[5] Puigdemont was President of the Government of Catalonia from January 2016 to October 2017 when he was removed from office by the Spanish Government following the Catalan declaration of independence. The ERC’s Junqueras was Vice President of Catalonia under Puigdemont.

[6] Opus Dei is a fundamentalist organisation within Roman Catholicism.

[7] Comunistes Cat is the short name, for Comunistes de Catalunya, the new name adopted in 2014 by the Partit dels Comunistes de Catalunya (PCC) created in 1981 as a pro-USSR split of the Eurocommunist PSUC. Soberanistas is a platform created by Comunistas Cat and independents. Initially it was a more pro-catalanist internal platform of Catalunya en Comú (the coalition led by Ada Colau, that includes her party, Podem, the Catalan branch of Izquierda Unida, ICV (greens), then they left Catalunya en Comu and reached an electoral agreement with the center-left pro-independence party, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC).