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Spanish state

When no one expected it.... the sun has come out

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Barely two weeks ago, no one could have imagined that the eviction of an 87-year-old woman from the home where she had lived for more than seven decades could end up precipitating a general election. Much less did we imagine that, along the way, thousands of people would once again occupy the Puerta del Sol [\[1\]](#), one of the most well-known and busiest squares in Madrid; that housing would displace immigration from the center of political discourse; and that a government—which had spent months weathering lawfare, corruption scandals, an offensive by the right, and the rise of the far right—would end up calling a snap election after losing a vote on housing decrees. Yet however hard it may be to believe, that is exactly what happened.

Two weeks that serve to recall one of Daniel Bensaïd's key teachings: history does not advance according to a railway timetable. Politics is also made up of forks in the road, accidents, leaps, and events that suddenly alter a landscape that seemed stable. Bensaïd wrote that revolutions "occur when and where they are least expected. Inevitably untimely." Not because they appear miraculously out of nowhere, but because certain events manage to crystallise contradictions that had long been accumulating beneath a veneer of apparent normality.

Maricarmen's eviction played out in just that way. Clearly, the housing crisis did not begin on September 23rd. Nor did the tenants' unions or the housing movement. For years, there has been an accumulation of unaffordable rents, evictions, touristification, investment funds, wages unable to keep pace with housing costs, and a generation condemned to spend a large share of its income simply to have a roof over its head. At the same time, an organised movement had been patiently built up that had spent years denouncing that situation. What was unforeseen was not the existence of all those ingredients, but the moment they ignited.

As Brais Fernández wrote a few days ago, the housing movement has managed to temporarily bring together two contradictions: one existing between economic growth and the material problems facing a growing segment of the working class, and one separating the promises of progressivism from the results of eight years of government. Prior organisation does not in itself explain the outbreak, but without that organisation, the outbreak likely would not have reached this scale.

In fact, this is perhaps the primary lesson of these past few weeks. Social upheavals are unpredictable. We can analyse the contradictions that make them possible, build up strength, form organisations, and identify grievances, but we never know exactly which event will strike the spark. Maricarmen was that spark, yet none of it would have been possible without the "slow impatience" involved in the socio-unionist building of the housing movement.

A spark that ignited during a period of reactionary advance, when public discourse seemed trapped by an agenda defined by the humanitarian crisis in Ceuta—a time when the right and the far right had succeeded in establishing the language of warfare, speaking of "invasion" and "external threat" and casting the migrant as the enemy. In this regard, Maricarmen's eviction and the subsequent mobilisation have not defeated that reactionary climate. It is best not to delude ourselves. Nothing that took place at Sol appears to have structurally altered the balance of power—yet. However, the conversation has changed, even if only temporarily.

The fact that one of the protest slogans has become "the invaders are the investors" implies—as Jaime Pastor points out—that the framework established in the wake of the Ceuta events has been momentarily overshadowed. For this is no mere rhetorical flourish; it shifts the explanation for the prevailing discontent. In contrast to attempts to justify the housing shortage by blaming poor migrants, the movement points to rent-seeking, investment funds, and the commodification of housing. The targets of blame shift, and in doing so, the potential political response is also

transformed. This shift—occurring in a climate dominated for months by a reactionary agenda—constitutes a small political victory in itself.

A parallel with the 15M movement [2] and many differences

The sight of the Puerta del Sol once again covered in tents has made a comparison to the 15-M movement inevitable. This is understandable. Such images are powerful, and political memory often operates through them. Yet, the similarities likely end there. We are not witnessing a new 15-M.

The 15M movement emerged in a different historical moment. Its backdrop was defined by the Great Recession of 2008, the bank bailout, austerity policies, youth unemployment, the Arab Spring, and the loss of credibility of a political system that seemed incapable of providing answers. Its impulse was fundamentally destituent: "they don't represent us," "PSOE and PP—it's the same shit," "they call it democracy, but it isn't." There was no single demand capable of encapsulating the movement, because what was at stake was precisely the entire political system that had emerged from the Transition [3]: the so-called "Regime of '78."

The square also functioned as a massive political school. Thousands of people who arrived without prior affiliation took part in assemblies, committees, endless debates, and forums for deliberation. People went to Sol not only to protest but also to try to understand what was happening and to think collectively about what to do. The square was simultaneously a site of protest, organisation, encounter, and pedagogy. Fifteen years later, the logic is different.

The current movement is focused on a much more specific conflict: housing, and particularly rents. It also involves concrete demands and pre-existing organisations. The Tenants' Union did not originate in Sol. It has been organising, training activists, establishing structures, building strike funds, and tackling specific conflicts since 2017. Surrounding it is a whole constellation of housing unions and assemblies, political organisations, feminist and student collectives, and social movements.

In the 15M, the organisations that came to the square, to a large extent, had to dissolve within it. Now the organisations come to Sol precisely as organisations and express themselves publicly with a visible presence within the camp. This profoundly modifies the character of the encampment.

The 2011 encampment at Sol was more spontaneous, chaotic, contradictory, and difficult to govern. Yet, precisely for that reason, it also possessed an enormous capacity to bring in people who had never considered themselves activists for any cause. It was a public square where political identities were under construction. The current encampment at Sol, by contrast, is rooted in far more defined identities.

Simply put, one could say that the 15M movement was more about pedagogy, whereas this movement is more about agitation and propaganda. That square was fundamentally turned inward: the discussion centered on who we were and what we wanted. Adrián Almazán has described it vividly: in 2011, there was hardly a moment without invitations to join debates, assemblies, or spaces for collective deliberation; in the current encampment, the emphasis lies much more heavily on the public square as a stage from which to project messages to cameras, the media, and social networks. There are hundreds of shops and immense organisational capacity, but—proportionally speaking—fewer spaces dedicated to the kind of endless political conversation that characterized the indignados movement. This is not necessarily worse. It is different.

Moreover, the demographic the 15M movement appealed to was largely a middle-class facing impoverishment: educated young people—with no future—who had been promised that studying, working hard, and making an effort would guarantee upward social mobility, a promise shattered by the 2008 crisis. Hence the figure of the highly qualified young person—holding multiple university degrees—condemned to unemployment, emigration, or precarious work. And although the macroeconomy is performing better now than it was fifteen years ago, that meritocratic promise has been significantly eroded.

Regarding the current encampment, it is difficult to pin down its sociological makeup, yet there is a substantial difference in how the participants refer to themselves. "Long live the working-class struggle" is a phrase heard at the camp, serving as a way for them to recognise or perceive themselves. Where the landlord and the tenant cease to appear simply as two private individuals freely entering into a transaction, and instead appear as parties to an unequal class relationship. Housing makes it possible to translate seemingly private experiences—failing to make rent, sharing an apartment at age 35, being forced out of one's neighbourhood—into the language of the working class. In this sense, there is an explicit recovery of the concept of class, which was far less present in the initial mindset of the 15M movement.

The 15M movement succeeded in challenging the "Regime of '78" with an extraordinary cross-cutting appeal that, for a time, blurred existing ideological boundaries. People who had voted for the Left or the Right—or who had never voted at all—could identify with the slogan "they don't represent us" and the notion that the system had "swindled" them; this intuitive challenge to the regime was the key to the movement's ability to expand.

The current movement has a much more clearly defined political stance; in a sense, it is not merely a political expression of discontent regarding the housing crisis but also a reactive movement against the rise of the far right. Anti-fascism is an explicit part of its identity; flags or propaganda from leftist organisations are not only accepted but viewed as a natural part of the encampment's ecosystem.

That is why its virtue differs from that of the 15M movement. It cannot trigger a shift of voters between political blocs—at least not in the short term—but it does have the capacity to remobilise a demoralised left-wing bloc, rejuvenate it by incorporating a new generation of activists, restore confidence in collective action, and demonstrate that the reactionary agenda is not invincible.

The context is also the reverse. The 15-M movement emerged after the Arab Spring, when an international wave of uprisings seemed to herald that anything was possible. The current encampment arises after years of the far right's rise, social defeats, and the retreat of the Left. As Brais Fernández points out, that earlier emergence was part of an international climate of offensive action; the current one, by contrast, arises as a reaction to the suffocation caused by a reactionary offensive.

For eight years, Pedro Sánchez has survived practically everything: motions of no confidence, pandemics, wars, lawfare, media onslaughts, right-wing mobilisations, corruption scandals, electoral defeats, and an opposition that has spent years predicting the government's imminent collapse on a daily basis. None of that managed to cut the legislative term short. Maricarmen did.

We must not forget that Sánchez arrived at Moncloa [\[4\]](#) leading a political bloc that had made ending evictions a symbol of the break with austerity policies. Eight years later, his government is calling elections precisely after the eviction of Maricarmen exposed the limits of those promises. Or rather, it was the accumulation of years of contradictions that unexpectedly found—in the eviction—a name, a face, and an event capable of transforming individual discontent into a collective force. For, as Bensaïd reminded us, history remains open, and events have a habit of arriving at the wrong moment, when no one was expecting them.

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*Translated and annotated by David Fagan for **International Viewpoint** from [Viento Sur](#).*

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[1] Gate of the Sun - the title references this.

[2] The anti-austerity movement in Spain, also referred to as the Movimiento 15-M (15-M Movement) and the Indignados Movement began on May 15, 2011.

[3] The Transition refers to the Spanish transition to bourgeois democracy from 1975 from the Francoist dictatorship to the consolidation of the parliamentary system of a constitutional monarchy overseen by the political right in alliance with the Socialist and Communist party leaderships.

[4] A district in the municipality of Madrid; the Palace of Moncloa is the residence of the Spanish Prime Minister.