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Spanish state

Real democracy now - credit, time, space and revolution

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Visiting the camp of the “indignados” at the Plaza del Catalunya in Barcelona, the famous Latin American writer Eduardo Galeano gave an interview in which he said notably this: “Life is worth being lived.... Another world is possible in the belly of this world ... I don’t know what will happen. And knowing what will happen isn’t really important to me. What matters to me is what is in the process of happening. What matters to me is the time that is, and the time which opens on other possibles which will be, but we don’t know what they will be”.

Crisis of credit, crisis of time, crisis of civilisation

These words shed light on the meaning of the little word “ya” in the slogan of the social movement currently underway in the Spanish state “Democracia real ya” (“real democracy now”). This “Ya” in fact concentrates all the revolutionary potential of this magnificent mobilisation: we want change now, don’t try to put us to sleep with your promises of a better future; we begin to impose this change now, by the struggle here; this struggle is hard but a source of intelligence, joy, dignity here and now; it opens the door to another possible world now since yes, it already exists, in negative form, as the opposite of the current world.

“Economy of time, to all this economy ultimately reduces itself” (Marx). The importance of the “ya” relates in fact to the crisis of capitalist temporality and indicates that it amounts to a major aspect of the very deep crisis of civilisation which is gnawing away at this society from within. A system in constant imbalance, a system in a hurry which can only run more quickly by ceaselessly expanding, capitalism constantly crushes the present under the future, pushing before it problems and solutions. The first grow, the second become increasingly improbable or unacceptable. Capitalism has no cure for this: it continues to run. It can simply do no other, for each of the capitals which make it up must choose: run or die.

To run, that is to invest, replace workers by more productive machines. To run is to sell at any price, realise surplus value without delay so as to reinvest it. To run is to incessantly create new needs for the overconsumption (of the rich) and over indebtedness (of the poor) to absorb overproduction by machines. To run is to manufacture goods of accelerated obsolescence so that demand is never satisfied. To run is to invest on credit, sell on credit, buy on credit, live on credit, love on credit, and die on credit.

The so called financial crisis has brought out all the absurdity of this permanent headlong flight. A crisis of credit, that is to say of the nerve centre supposed to coordinate the activities of the competing capitals and equalise the rate of profit, this crisis of finance is in reality that of globalised capitalism as mode of production of social existence. It is the crisis of hollow promises; the crisis of “buy now, pay later”; the crisis of Helmut Schmidt’s theorem (“The profits of today are the investments of tomorrow, and the investments of tomorrow are the jobs of the day after”); the crisis of belief in a technological deus ex machina which will arrive in time to prevent an ecological disaster;... and the crisis of the corrupt political ostriches, so servile in relation to capital and so arrogant in relation to their peoples, for whom the portfolio takes the place of the brain and neoliberalism that of thought.

No to a destructive recovery, yes to the

alternative. Now

Capitalism resolves nothing. It destroys everything. At the planetary level, the International Energy Agency has just revealed that CO2 emissions increased by 1.6 Gt in 2010. This unprecedented increase confirms that the 2°C ceiling on increases in temperature in relation to the pre-industrial period can no longer be respected. In the absence of very radical measures taken now, the cap is sealed on an increase in the earth's temperature of at least 4°C by the end of the century, leading to a series of irreversible disasters on the human scale over time. On the social side, it is enough to cast a glance at the unemployment statistics, in particular for youth, to grasp the extent of the carnage: more than 40% in Spain, more than 30% in Greece and Ireland, more than 20% in France and in Germany. Deprived of the right to make themselves useful to society, millions of young people with degrees, qualified, are sentenced to survive on 500 or 600 Euros per month, in the midst of an ocean of unemployed capital.

More and more people understand that to revive this rotten system in hoping that tomorrow all will be better will only increase destruction of every kind. At the ecological level that would mean still more commodities produced, thus energy consumed, thus greenhouse effect gases sent into the atmosphere – not to mention the capitalist appropriation of lands, forests, the air as well as the sorcerer's apprentice technologies (GMO, nuclear power, agro fuels, shale gas, "clean coal" and so on). At the social level, the recovery of production would not satisfy the most crying social needs, given that these are generally not solvent. Capitalism only produces for profit, its recovery would necessitate then accepting the austerity plans of the IMF and the governments, which seek quite simply to destroy what remains of the welfare state: extension of working life, cuts in wages, deep cuts in the public sector and social security, increased flexibility and precarity and so on.

An alternative is necessary .Not tomorrow, now. An immediate alternative based on the intelligent use of "what is subversive in the real" in Bernard Friot's formula. To elaborate, to identify its existing points of support, it is necessary to think; to think it is necessary to stop and to rally in a determined space. To reconquer time and space, to rebuild the social link: that is what the indignados in the Spanish state are doing. .The manifestos they adopt, following long democratic debates in popular assemblies show that the method is fertile. As in Tahrir Square in Egypt or the Casbah in Tunisia, this atypical mobilisation thus confirms a great lesson from the history of the workers' movement: collective struggle allows consciousness to make enormous leaps forward; which can completely change the relationship of forces because as Marx says, "ideas become a material force when they grip the masses".

“Try to begin to change the world”

What ideas? There is no lack of them! Nonetheless, in the creative abundance of demands formulated by the indignados of Madrid, Barcelona and elsewhere, two seem especially significant: the nationalisation of finance and that of energy. On the one hand, they rest on the fact that a public sector already exists – that is "the subversive in the real", the opening towards another possible. On the other hand, if we stress the significance of it, it is not by dogmatic attachment to the sacred recipes of the Transitional Programme, but for strategic reasons, based on a precise analysis: these two sectors are the main ones responsible for the social and environmental damage, they are both linked to the huge credits necessary for long term investment in fixed capital (oil platforms, refineries, electric power stations and so on), they dominate the economy as well as politics, and block any ecosocialist solution, in such a way that their infernal coupling is leading humanity into the wall.

Together with the radical reduction of working time (without loss of wages and with compensatory hiring) and with democratic reforms in the political field, these two demands , it seems to us, should be put at the heart of any anti-capitalist programme. They confer on it much force and credibility, because they undoubtedly respond to vital and unavoidable objectives necessities (notably the necessity of urgently taking drastic measures to avoid a rising of sea levels by a metre or more by the end of the century!).

We can already hear the sceptical and the blasé: you take your dreams for reality, people are too individualistic, the relations of force are too degraded, the grip of the bureaucracies is strong, class consciousness is in freefall, the socialist project is discredited and so on. Certainly all these factors should temper the enthusiasm a little. But above all what it is about is saluting the magnificent lesson of audacity, courage, intelligence and voluntarism (in the good sense of the term) given by the indignados of the Puerta del Sol and the Plaza del Catalunya!

“Try to begin to change the world” said Ernest Mandel, taking up a theme from the last of Marx's eleven theses on Feuerbach (“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it”). Some thousands of youths have begun, and they have showed in practice that our old friend the mole, the revolution, digs under the arid surface of this spuriously triumphant capitalism.