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Catalonia

The will of the people cannot be manipulated

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Definitely the evening of Sunday November 25, 2012 was not the night that Artur Mas had dreamed of. Far from the exceptional majority that he had asked for he will now have to head a weakened government from which to manage the promised consultation on Catalan national rights and the already anticipated new package of cuts.

The mobilization of 11-S went beyond CiU (Convergence and Union) in its approach but the latter was skillful enough to present itself as the only force that could lead the process and launched a regrettable operation of presidential exaltation of the figure of Mas, who suddenly became a high level "statesman" endowed with a historic mission: take Catalonia "national fulfillment".

This operation ultimately did not serve to reinforce CiU, either because voters looking for a party that "guarantees" a pro-independence stance opted for ERC, the big winner of the day with their 496,292 (13.68%) votes and 21 deputies, or because, despite all the efforts, CiU could not persuade a significant part of the electorate to forget that the real historical mission of Mas is much more prosaic: being the political executor of a vast reorganization of society at the service of finance capital.

The PSC (Socialist Party of Catalonia) continues a downhill journey that seems to have no end. Gone are the 1,183,299 votes (38.2%) it scored in 1999. Although its leaders feared a still worse outcome, their meagre 523,333 votes (14.6%) converted the elongated shadow of Greece's PASOK into a nightmare which the P (a) S (o) C will not easily exorcise. Torn by tensions between its more Catalanist sector and that more linked to the PSOE, it lacks a credible proposal in the national field, which overlaps with its lack of credibility as a left alternative bearer of another model of society, and its voters have switched to the CiU and ERC and Ciutadans. Devoid of a transformational project and converted into a faithful servant of financial power, European social democracy appears today as a current which is historically exhausted and without its own political project. The PSC is a faithful reflection of this.

The remarkable mobilization of the *españolista* [Spanish centralist] vote, expressed above all in the rise of Ciudadanos who tripled their three previous seats and transformed their 106,154 votes (3.39%) in 2010 to 274,925 (7.58%), is another relevant point from 25-N. This explains how the PP managed to avoid paying the price for Rajoy's cuts and increased their vote from 387,066 votes (12.3%) and 18 seats to 471,197 (13%) and 19 deputies.

The basic logic behind the rise of the *españolista* vote is the development of an independence movement devoid of social content which opens the doors to the demagoguery of Ciudadanos and the PP, and the entire media network, in a context where the trade unions, bureaucratized and institutionalized, and the traditional parties of the left, after decades of acceptance of social liberalism, have lost their organic link with a working class which is ever more de-structured. It is not clear, however, that beyond an increase in passive electoral support, *españolismo* generates a real social polarization in the popular neighborhoods. The latent threat is there, anyway, which clearly raises the classical old problem of linking the national and social questions.

For the alternative left, 358,857 votes (9.9%) allowed ICV-EUiA (Initiative for a green Catalonia – United Left) to gain 13 deputies, an increase that while significant does not imply a qualitative change, after a fairly lightweight campaign, with a discourse that did not go much beyond defending "social policies" and apparently oriented to finding the disenchanting ex-PSC vote. ICV-EUiA represented, until now, the only credible electoral option and the "useful vote" to the left of the PSC for many voters, but at the same time very clearly appears as "another party", inserted in the traditional party system, little connected with social activism and marked by its managerial past in the Tripartito.

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The great novelty in this respect is the emergence of the CUP-Alternativa d'Esquerres (Popular Unity Candidates - Left-Wing Alternative), whose 126,219 votes (3.48%) earned it three deputies. Born as the political instrument of the pro-independence left, the CUP entered Parliament with the electoral and activist support of the organised anti-capitalist left, the alternative municipal movement and broad sectors of the social left alien to the independence movement, something that will force a complex post-election management. After a campaign where the anti-capitalist and democratic radical profile of rupture formed the dominant note, for the first time a left-wing formation unrelated to the consensus of the transition and with a clear project of rupture has entered the Parliament. The avowed objective: to be the "Trojan horse" of the popular classes.

As a whole, despite the weakness of the forces opposed to austerity and the note that the construction of an alternative with the possibility of becoming a majority is still far, the election results show that the crisis is eroding the traditional party system. The sequestration of politics by financial power causes a growing vacuum and implosion of the democratic institutional mechanisms, causing stress to the political system and eroding the pillars of bipartisanship. The two major parties of Catalan politics, CiU and the PSC, together won 45% of the vote, as against 56.8% in 2010, 58.3% in 2006, 62,1% in 2003 and 75% in 1999. If we add the votes of another big nationwide party, the PP, we get 58%, compared to 69.1% in 2010, 69.3% in 2006, 74% in 2003 and 84.5% in 1999. A clear trend.

With Mas the Messiah weakened Messiah, a pro-independence dynamic whose reversal would be very complicated for CiU and the total bailout of the Spanish state in the horizon, all indications are that the new parliament will not last four years and that it will be anything but placid. For the Catalan left a double task now appears inescapable: to demand that the referendum is held as soon as possible, to make it an exercise in democratic rupture with the flawed regime born in 1978 and to reactivate the pulse of social outrage at the new adjustments which are coming. The challenge? To ensure that Mas the Messiah becomes nothing more than Mas the Brief.