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Catalonia

Catalan “national transition” process

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The growing corruption scandals which envelop Catalan politics, the intra and inter party spying and the imminent new wave of cuts in social expenditure by the government of Artur Mas indicate without equivocation that social and political instability will be the dominant note as the process of Catalan “national transition” advances. A process permanently intertwined with a durable economic crisis.

The right nationalist CiU (Convergence and Union) party has to manage a situation in which the Catalan financial establishment is alarmed at the dynamic of institutional instability opened and wishes to reverse the momentum, while the social base has shifted towards the option of independence in the absence of other credible alternatives. Its political future will depend to a great extent on its capacity to resolve these tensions, in a context which is far too turbulent for a formation of conservatism and order.

The weakness of the Mas government, the fruit of an unstable pact between the CiU and the ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, a moderate left pro-independence party), offers social and political forces opposed to austerity policies a greater opportunity to influence this process of “national transition” than that initially envisaged, although the relationship of forces and the point of departure are still very unfavourable.

In this volatile context, there are two challenges: firstly, to guarantee that the exercise of the right to decide will go to the limit and that the referendum on independence takes place while maintaining the social pressure on the CiU not to backtrack and neutralizing the repressive manoeuvres of the Rajoy government, with the complicity of the PSOE.

Secondly, to ensure that the CiU and ERC do not capitalize on the process to their own profit. The social and popular movements and the Catalan social and political left must not leave the initiative in the hands of Mas and Junqueras. They should attempt to articulate a broad social pole favourable to the exercise of the right to decide and opposed to austerity policies.

We defend the right to self-determination without making independence an “a priori” and we consider that the concrete option to defend should be determined according to what will be most favourable to the interests of the majority, we should stress that a “yes” to independence in a future referendum appears now as the option with the greatest democratic content and the greatest potential for rupture. It should be done based on a firm internationalist conviction and the defence of a horizon of a free federation of the peoples of Europe. It should also be done on the basis of the defence of an idea of nation or culture combining the firm defence of the Catalan language with that of a Catalonia which is multilingual and multiethnic, and with a vision of Catalan culture which is not reduced to the popular indigenous traditions.

The main strategic political question is to benefit from the democratic potential opened by the debate on independence so as not only to generate a democratic rupture with the current institutional framework, but also to go beyond the derisory framework fixed by the CiU and ERC and enlarge the “right to decide” to other spheres of society. Faced with independence as a miracle recipe the debate to be posed is what Catalonia we want, what model of country and society.

Catalonia is not a homogenous entity but a society traversed by social contradictions. We are not all in the same boat and even if we were, some travel first class while the others are in the holds. Why can the Catalan people decide on independence and not on austerity? Why can Catalan women decide on what relation they wish to have with Spain when they cannot make decisions concerning their own body? Sovereignty? And what about food sovereignty

against agro-business? Controlling our destiny? Fine, why not begin in the workplace?

What is the point of demanding “independence” in relation to the Spanish state if we remain trapped by the policies of the European Union? The acceptance of the diktats of the EU by the Mas government empties the right to decide of its content. Independence under the supervision of the Troika and Merkel would be sovereignty without content. A contradiction in terms, Real sovereignty involves a break with the policies of austerity and neo-colonial submission to the Troika. To do this, the referendum on independence cannot be associated with the acceptance of an EU policy which instead of giving more freedom to the people robs them of this freedom in the interests of a financial minority.

Starting from the official discourse on the “national transition” it is necessary to develop an alternative proposal which demonstrates the contradictions and limits of this discourse so as to use the democratic momentum of the independence drive and avoid it being diverted against the social struggles opposing austerity and the process of legitimating of the regime opened after the rebellion of the indignant.

The debate on independence and a state should serve to stress the need for a constituent process for Catalonia in which the new institutional framework and model of society can be defined. That is the central question. There are a series of strategic battles to prepare to fix the new rules of the game. What electoral system? What model of work relations? What citizenship rights for immigrants? What defence policy? And many other questions.

At the same time the pro-independence dynamic should be linked with the need for a break at the scale of the Spanish state with the decrepit regime born from the Transition so as to avoid the respective rights capitalizing on the current situation. That involves, outside of Catalonia, an effort of political explanation of the process underway on the part of the Catalan democratic and pro-sovereignty forces and above all the strategic comprehension by the indignant and anti-austerity forces that the democratic resolution of the national question is a fundamental element for breaking the edifice forged by the false “consensus” of the Transition.

It is about making sure that the Catalan people decide their future freely and that an act of sovereignty for Catalonia, far from contributing to legitimate an ever more discredited political and institutional model, serves as a decisive element to unleash a deep crisis of the regime throughout the Spanish state and opens the way to a dynamic of specific national constituent processes, independent but coordinated and feeding off each other in their common search for a new order which is just, democratic and solidarity-based.