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Catalonia

Tribulations and quagmires of the independence process

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Catalan politics has seemed for a long time like a contest of figure skating on ice in slow motion. The actors are moving very slowly, offering their best smiles to accompany their better pirouettes. First, the date and the question. Afterwards, the long preparation of the consultation. Then, the signing of the decree calling the 9N vote. After this, the agonizing debate on the call for elections. And so on.

In reality, the Catalan political system has imploded under the dual impact of 15M and the rise of the pro-independence movement, causing an unparalleled crisis of the CiU, PSC and PP. A particular political architecture has disappeared and another is in the process of consolidation. The moment of truth, 2015 promises to be a momentous year for the outcome of the prolonged political crisis in the Spanish state and for the Catalan independence process. The succession of electoral consultations will be a test, at the Spanish level, of the ability of the PP and PSOE to withstand the impact of Podemos and, at the Catalan level, to determine the relative strength of Mas and the ERC in the fight for internal hegemony over the independence process, as well as the strength or weakness of the latter.

Throughout this long election cycle, the 27S and the succeeding general elections have condensed popular hopes in Catalonia. For some, all depended on a majority in the key independence plebiscite on the first date. For others, it is the victory of Podemos in the second which opens the door to the future. Clearly, there is a bifurcation of possible futures. But are they simply parallel paths, or is it possible to envisage a convergence?

This is nowadays the strategic debate, surprisingly virtually nonexistent, that must be addressed from any perspective that wants to build a popular majority for change in Catalonia and which facilitates the achievement of democratic scenarios and rupture in the Spanish state as a whole.

The current impasse of the independence process is the result of the weaknesses of its foundational discourse, based on the disconnection of the demand for independence from any substantive social content and specific measures for social improvements for the popular classes. The strategic mistake committed by the Asambleia Nacional Catalana (ANC Catalan National Assembly), and long signaled by the political sectors, like the Procés Constituent or the Candidaturas de Unitat Popular (CUP), has been the construction of a broad majority and a transversal movement of "national unity" without a specific social dimension, considering that the mere demand for "independence" was already enough for an aggregate majority. The approach of "national unity" puts the abstract nation above the concrete, but providing the independence process with a citizen rescue plan does not divide or fragment it -on the contrary, it strengthens it. Catalan society is profoundly divided, torn by reality, by four years of austerity policies and more than three long decades of neoliberalism. There is no possible unity for what is fractured internally if you obviate the causes of failure, and even more if those who must steer unity they are perceived by many citizens as being responsible for the social debacle.

To obviate the immediate social emergencies and uncritically accept the leadership of Artur Mas is what divides and confronts the social and the national, giving oxygen to the Catalan right and leading to apathy toward the pro-sovereignty process among those segments of the people of Catalonia with less political-cultural identification with Catalanism. A unity that artificially tries to eliminate the contradictions of all sorts that permeate Catalan society ends up shooting itself in the foot. The combination of a national demand emptied of express social dimension and Artur Mas as political head of the independence process has been lethal to any expansion of the latter's social basis beyond its initial momentum.

Tribulations and quagmires of the independence process

How would things have been if the slogan of independence of 11S in 2012 had been accompanied by a basic social emergency program? What would it have been like if the "V" of 11S in 2013 had, apart from the demand for independence, expressed the desire for an emergency anti-crisis package? What would have happened if next to the "President, to the polls" of Carme Forcadell there had been a "President, apply a social emergency program!"? Where would we be if the signing of the decree calling the 9N on 27 September 2014 had been accompanied by a battery of basic measures of citizen respect?

The answer is clear: the forces of the left or centre left present in the independence process, such as the ERC or CUP, would have operated in a more favorable context, and all the social and political organizations outside the independence process (from the major trade unions to the alternative social movements), and their social bases, would to a greater or lesser extent have become involved in it. The social support for the process would have been widened in its popular and working class aspect. Of course the operations behind the scenes of the Catalan financial oligarchy to slow down the sovereignty process would have been even more intense, as would the contradictions that the CDC would have to support. But it would have been very difficult for the latter to climb down and, if so, it would have self-destructed.

The discussion on the enlargement of a popular sovereignty process could appear (erroneously) abstract in the first stage of the process, from the 11S of 2012 up to the 9N of 2014. But the current impasse and, above all, the consolidation of Podemos and Podem make it very specific and tangible. Those who defend only independence (or at least over-determine everything else from this) and are not in sympathy with 15M or the citizen mareas, are forced to confront a quite unequivocal reality: the urgent strategic need to expand the social base of the sovereignty process. This is the challenge that the ANC must openly address if it wants the process to be strengthened.

And, in parallel, those of us situated in the camp of the emancipation of the people at the bottom, in the synthesis between the social and national, in the fight against all kinds of oppression and inequality, face a challenge that, at the same time, points to unprecedented opportunities and a thrilling risk.