The Challenge of Podemos

written by Manel Barriere, Andy Durgan, Sam Robson | February 2, 2015

The emergence of so-called populist parties as a response to increasingly discredited political elites is a European-wide phenomenon. In most cases these parties have emerged on the right, if not the far-right. Not so in the Spanish state where Podemos, after barely ten months in existence, appears to be undermining the whole political set up in place since the end of the Franco dictatorship in the late 1970s.

In May it astounded political commentators, winning 1.2 million votes and five MEPs in the European elections. By the end of November it was, even more surprisingly, leading the polls ahead of the two parties that have dominated Spanish politics for over 30 years: the conservative People's Party (PP) and the Socialist Party (PSOE).[1] At the time of writing, Podemos boasts a quarter of a million people (informally) registered as members, who participate in the decision making processes. Its leadership now talks of winning next year's general elections. Such is its impact that the Fourth International's Anticapitalist Left describes Podemos as "the vehicle through which citizens' indignation is expressed and a unique opportunity to break at the root the miseries inherited from the dictatorship and the 40-year offensive of neoliberal and oligarchic capitalism".[2]

Yet within a relatively short time span the new party has adopted a highly centralised structure and openly describes its new programme as "social democratic". It has also, with the calculated ambiguity of its politics, begun to attract voters from outside the left.[3] So are the hopes initially placed in Podemos by the left, both in the Spanish state and internationally, justified?

Out of the squares

Central to Podemos's success has been the widespread existence of corruption among politicians and business people associated with them. Most have been accused of tax fraud or of accepting pay-offs for building contracts. Since the elections of November 2011, 1,900 people have been charged in such cases and 170 of them condemned, although few have been imprisoned.[4] The sense that such corruption is endemic comes on top of the effects of the crisis and swingeing austerity measures introduced by both main parties. While unemployment (at around 27 percent, over 50 percent among youth) and poverty have soared (with 25 percent living below the poverty line), the number of millionaires has actually increased in recent years. Distribution of wealth in Spain is now the second most unequal in the European Union.

Mass resistance, not only to austerity but to the whole political set up since the transition to democracy, emerged in May 2011 with the occupation of public squares by the 15-M (indignados) movement.[5] Despite not sustaining the initial level of mobilisation, 15-M left a deep mark on the country's collective consciousness. Now millions perceive corruption as the direct cause of the crisis and that the constitutional settlement of 1978 installed a system that operated behind people's backs and to the benefit of a minority.

Podemos's success also has to be seen in relation to the role of the mainstream left. In power for 21 of the last 32 years, the PSOE has long since lost any credibility as a party of change due to its systematic attacks on its working class base and its abject subservience to the needs of capital. Corruption cases have not only been common inside the PSOE, but even among some leading members of the main unions, CCOO and UGT.[6] More importantly, the unions are seen as sharing responsibility for the failed "regime of 1978" and incapable of either reacting effectively in response

to the PP's offensive or of understanding the new situation created by the 15-M. This malaise also affects the Communist Party led United Left (IU) which now sees its support, gained as a result of the crisis of the two-party system, plummeting in the polls at the expense of Podemos.

The 15-M may have left the squares but its assembly-based methods of organisation continue to influence subsequent mobilisations. This has particularly been the case with the anti-eviction campaign, *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH), which has managed to pinpoint the responsibility of the financial institutions for the suffering of thousands, and created a highly popular and radical movement. Rank and file anti-cuts movements, the *mareas* (tides), inspired by the 15-M, have mobilised massively in defence of health and education. Then on 22 March this year 1 million people descended on Madrid for "bread, work and a roof". These "Marches for Dignity" were organised by the smaller left unions and local collectives; evidence that the spirit of 15-M is very much alive.

Yet despite the mood of radicalisation generated by such struggles, which have included some victories, a growing feeling has emerged that mobilisation alone has not led to real change and that a political alternative is necessary.

From protest to parliament

Behind the formation of Podemos was a group of young university lecturers, many from the Madrid Complutense University political science and philosophy departments. Most had been politically active, some as members of IU. They argued:

Spain faces a crisis of regime resulting primarily by a breakdown in consensus and the dislocation of traditional political identities; the conditions exist for a populist left—which does not consist in symbolically carving out positions within the regime, but seeks to create another dichotomy—articulated in a new political will with a majority vocation.[7]

Influenced by Gramscian arguments about the struggle for hegemony, this group decided to make a very thought-out intervention into the mass media as a form of raising political consciousness. Its online programme of political debate, *La Tuerka*, became the mouthpiece of the 15-M, providing daily coverage of what was happening in the squares. More importantly, it served as a launch pad for its charismatic presenter, Pablo Iglesias, onto national television. Iglesias, a political science teacher at the Complutense, rapidly acquired fame and notoriety with his inflexible, albeit didactic, confrontations on popular chat shows with representatives of the political establishment. As Iglesias himself puts it, for most people such shows are "much more important" than any debate in parliament.[8] According to Iglesias:

15-M was a symptom that this country was changing, that the principal [forms of] consensus were changing…a symptom of regime crisis that could later emerge in many places…something that functions in the magma and suddenly makes many people in this country see a guy with a pony tail [Iglesias] on television and listen to him.[9]

Podemos's visibility in the media became "a particularly powerful communication tool and symbolic catalyst for popular articulation of the European election campaign".[10]

Podemos was launched in early 2014 with a call to stand a unitary list in the European elections "headed by people that express new ways to relate to politics and represent a real threat for the two-party system…and those who have hijacked our democracy".[11] Iglesias launched the challenge to get 50,000 signatures to support this candidature. Amazingly, this was achieved within three days. Nationally the project was rapidly set up through the creation of "circles", effectively a cross

between an open assembly and a party branch. Podemos could appear like Bepe Grillo's Five Star Movement in Italy, which had similar meteoric success and its own brand of what is often termed "anti-politics", but such comparisons are superficial and ignore the mass left wing base of the new party.

Populism

During the first months Podemos was quite a fragmented and diverse project, both in terms of organisation and ideology, but Iglesias and his collaborators had a clear idea about what they wanted to build. Their very specific theoretical analysis was based on the experiences of various Latin American radical reform movements, in Venezuela, Bolivia and, particularly, Ecuador.[12] Rather than mere electoral victories these processes were:

driven by new national-popular majorities that required profound political changes demanding access to power and that sparked a war of positions for the conquest of the state. During these processes, and at a time when the traditional order was in a state of decomposition, virtuous interventions have opened completely new political opportunities, almost always causing shock and discomfort within the traditional left.[13]

Not that it was a question of just copying the Latin American experience but "translating, reformulating, plundering the arsenal of concepts and examples".[14] Like Hugo Chávez, "Podemos talks about winning, about razing to the ground, about bringing down the system… In the same way, the ambiguity of Podemos's discourse, which is as sensational for some as it is irritating for others, is also a lesson learned from the Bolivarian process".[15]

In particular the leaders of Podemos are influenced by the "post-Marxist" Argentine political theorist Ernesto Laclau and his conception of populism in relation to Latin America. Laclau, like Iglesias and his closest collaborators, takes his cue from the reformist reading of Antonio Gramsci on the struggle for hegemony that became popular in academic and Eurocommunist circles in the 1970s.[16]

Laclau's conception of populism is seen by the Podemos leadership as clearly tying in with the 15-M, when people saw that a series of shared demands were not accepted by supposedly democratic institutions, thus leading to a conflict between "the people" and "the power". Also like Laclau, Podemos's ideologues have defined their demands as "common sense", not as "anti-system"; something that breaks with the dynamic of many of the social movements seen in the Spanish state in the last decade, but links well with one of the central slogans of the 15-M: "We are not anti-system. The system is anti us".

Within this schema an "imagined people" is diametrically opposed to the "caste", a term that defines those who have occupied the institutions of power behind the backs of the citizenry, selling popular sovereignty over to international economic interests and benefitting themselves economically, either legally or illegally.[17] The people-caste antagonism substitutes itself for the "old" antagonism of proletariat-bourgeoisie, successfully building a "new consciousness" where the left has failed. This new imagined identity binds together "those below against those above". The traditional left-right axis is thus dismissed as paralysing, given its incapacity to resuscitate a "lost class consciousness" which in turn has impeded the building of a new transforming project on the left. Hence Iglesias argues that for the left to win, it:

needs to stop being a religion and become a tool in the hands of the people. It needs to become the people… We like our slogans, symbols and anthems. We like getting together as a group. We think that if we get several party initials on a poster this means we are going to win. No way. It is about people's anger and hopes. It is about reaching people who otherwise would see us as aliens because

the left has been defeated.[18]

Finally, a fundamental question is leadership. According to Laclau:

Once a series of unmet demands are raised, these must crystallise around a leader [because] the more institutionalised a society is the more people live immanently within an impersonal apparatus. But…the more people find their social roots exposed, the more they will need a form of exterior identification of their daily experience through which [they can] reconstruct a sense of their own identity.[19]

According to Iglesias, the failure of the traditional left and the perception that mobilisation has not led to concrete victories have indeed left people with their "social roots exposed". Such mobilisations are now presented as "belonging to a *past phase* in the political process, now followed by a mainly *institutional* phase".[20]

As leading Podemos theorist Íñigo Errejón argues:

Contrary to the argument claiming that there is "no shortcut", defended by "movementist" currents and the extreme left, Podemos—born from "above" and not "from below"—argues that election time is also a time of articulation and construction of political identities.[21]

So it is not about a leadership forged in the struggles from below, but on an ideological plane, by way of a scrupulously worked out discourse which supposedly fits with the current state of mass consciousness. As a consequence both Iglesias and the rest of the Podemos leadership tend to vacillate when asked about controversial subjects such as immigration, nationalisation or the right to self-determination. Podemos's idea of "the people" has also provoked controversy in the national minorities, Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia, where, as a result, the new party has not had the same impact as in the rest of the state. These ambiguities expose the contradictions at the heart of the party, as would become much clearer during the founding process between 15 September and 15 November, which included the Citizens' Assembly in October.

Democracy and leadership

After the Euro-elections last May there was a pressing need to organise the party's internal structures. From the first moment it became clear that Iglesias and his closest collaborators were in conflict with many of the activists in the circles. The team put in place to prepare and establish the norms for the Citizens' Assembly in October was elected over the internet on the sole basis that it was headed by Iglesias, a method that now became central to the weakening of the circles' control over the party.

At the centre of the process around the Assembly was the discussion of three documents on ethical, political and organisational principles. The methodology used was different from that before the EU elections, which had seen a profoundly open and democratic elaboration of the programme and the constitution of electoral lists centred on the circles. Instead debates were now centred on the teams that presented the documents.

Differences were clearest in the debate over organisational principles, which polarised round two different conceptions of democracy and leadership. Iglesias's document was based on a centralist conception whereby the general secretary chooses an executive of 15, while a citizens' council, a political leadership consisting of 62 people, would be elected online by all those listed as "members" on the basis of both individual candidates and open lists which could be voted for as a block or separately. The council in turn would endorse the executive and interpret the mandates of a national

assembly that meets every three years. While the general secretary can call assemblies at any level and propose or remove members of the executive at will, in order for the membership to do the same, 25 percent of those registered, over 60,000 people at the time of writing, or 30 percent of the circles, need to support such a move.

Opposition to Iglesias's position came from a grouping, Sumando Podemos ("joining together we can"), supported by three of the party's MEPs, Anticapitalist Left (IA), and many local activists and centred on organising the party on the basis of direct participatory democracy, rooted in the localities, the social movements and the circles.[22] Iglesias pointed instead to the many people outside the circles "to whom we want to give instruments and mechanisms so they can form part of this enormous collective process".[23]

For Errejón:

Our political proposal is saying that a deep and narrow window of opportunity has opened up that could be closed, thus we have to create a very democratic organisation that is in the hands of the members but as well…an extraordinarily efficient…electoral war machine…it would make no sense to build [such a machine]…without giving ourselves an organisational structure that allows us to achieve our political objective.[24]

So what was at stake was the absolute control of the organisation by the founding nucleus, a control that would be legitimised by online voting providing a massive personal vote for Iglesias and those he supported so he could lead a process—without any obstacles—that will culminate with the general elections scheduled for the autumn of 2015.

For this to happen it was necessary to weaken any serious internal opposition; hence the prohibition on anyone belonging to other political organisations holding positions of leadership. This measure was primarily aimed at the IA, which had played a key role in the launching of Podemos, providing both many of the signatories on the founding manifesto and the initial organisational muscle to set up the circles. Consequently in the recent elections for the citizens' council no members of IA stood, not even its MEP Teresa Rodríguez. Likewise, those around Iglesias won a proposal not to contest next May's local elections, arguing that the party was still too disorganised to be able to control those who stood.

As expected Iglesias's team won both the organisational debate, with over 90,000 voting for his position, and 14,000 for Sumando Podemos's proposals, thus leaving the circles with very little means to influence the higher levels of the party. A few weeks later the leadership elections, from which Sumando had withdrawn in protest at the lack of any consensus, led to Iglesias, as general secretary, and his list of 62 for the citizens' council getting on average around 80,000 votes while the candidate who came sixty-third got barely 3,000. The fact that there were hundreds of candidates, many standing individually, meant that any alternative vote was completely fragmented.

A new reformism?

At the time of writing most of the party's programme had yet to be formalised, but based on declarations by its leading figures and the EU election campaign it would be expected to include the end of political privileges (for example, the near automatic move from ministry to boardroom); strict controls on MPs' income; mechanisms to allow popular control over elected representatives; the introduction of self-determination for the national minorities; and the direct election of the head of state (as opposed to the hereditary monarchy now in place). Podemos aims to carry out such measures through a constituent process which would dismantle the "regime of 1978".

Since the EU elections, however, all the signs are that much of the early radicalism will be ditched. Iglesias, speaking in late October, turned to Lenin to justify this turn to pragmatism:

The true Lenin of the revolution is that of the NEP, a Lenin that gets up in the morning with an enormous headache and says: everything that I knew up till now has turned out not to be true and what we have to do is apply forms of capitalist development in the countryside because if not it will be impossible to make the economy work.[25]

This shift is clear in the party's preliminary economic programme presented in late November. Written by two leading social democratic economists, Juan Torres López and Vicenç Navarro, it sets out a series of "short-term pragmatic proposals" aimed at "acting with realism (but) without renouncing our dreams". Scandinavian social democracy is now cited as a model rather than the Bolivarian Revolution. Justification for this shift is defended with the familiar argument that there was now a need for the party to be "responsible" faced with the tasks of government.

Aiming to introduce a series of reforms that would bring under control the worst excesses of neoliberalism and lead to considerable benefits for the population, the economic programme includes progressive taxation, the establishment of a public bank, the repeal of the PP's punitive labour reform, a 35-hour week and a tax on selling and buying operations on the stock exchange. Central to funding its proposals is the end of rampant tax evasion and the establishment of a level of taxation similar to the average rate in the EU.[26]

Gone from the programme for the EU elections are: a basic universal wage for all citizens (instead there will be more state aid to those in poverty), the nationalisation of "strategic sectors of the economy", the lowering of the retirement age to 60 (instead it will drop from 67 back to 65) and, what was the centrepiece in May, the cancellation of the Spanish state's debt. Instead the debt will be "renegotiated" from the position of a defence of "national interests". Clearly Podemos's leaders have taken their cue from Syriza (the Greek Coalition of the Radical Left)[27] in defending the notion of renegotiation. As with the Greek case, this puts the whole of its economic reforms in the hands of the European Central Bank. Like Syriza, Podemos rules out a break with both the EU and the euro if the bankers prevent any escape from a crippling debt.

In case anyone was in doubt as to the implications of such a strategy, the programme speaks of the "costs and sacrifices" that will be necessary because of government policies in recent years and past decisions such as signing the 1991 Maastricht Treaty. Once in power, Podemos will meet "social agents", including unions and employers, as part of the process of drawing up a definitive programme.

For many, Podemos increasingly seems like the PSOE at the end of the 1970s. Iglesias himself confirms that "there is a sensation…around Podemos that there was with the PSOE before the elections of 1982" when the Socialists won a landslide victory in what is generally considered to be the final act of the transition to democracy. Podemos itself speaks of building in "the space between the PSOE and IU". The image of bright young talented newcomers is reminiscent of the PSOE in 1982, as is the massive amount of hope that the party would bring real change. Future prime minister and PSOE leader Felipe González spoke, for instance, in 1979, in terms similar to Podemos today, about the need for democracy to be "felt and lived in the municipality, the factories, in the schools, the hospitals, the universities, the workshops" and no longer "an abstract instrument for the exclusive use of professional politicians or those of us who are obliged to engage in politics due to our ideological or moral commitment".[28]

Comparisons, however, between the PSOE in the 1970s and Podemos have a limited validity. Even at the end of the dictatorship the PSOE was a nationally structured party, with a long, albeit

chequered, history. Backed with massive funding by the German Social Democratic Party, its aim in 1982 was to "modernise" Spain and prepare the country for EU membership. More to the point are both the context of crisis in which Podemos must operate and, importantly, the political and social base of the new party as reflected in the circles.

Squaring the circle

If and when Podemos wins the elections, those charged with carrying out its programme would be, in Iglesias's words, the "best" experts available. According to Iglesias:

We don't want a Podemos government but a government of the best. It is not politicians that make public administration and hospitals work; they are made to work by the people, in particular the most prepared people. We want to count on all of them so the country has a reasonable, decent, government.[29]

A reflection of what type of administration is imagined can be seen by looking at those elected in November on Iglesias's list to Podemos's leadership. In contrast to the party's mass base, all are university educated; most holding professional, teaching or research posts.[30] There are few activists and hardly anyone with workplace or trade union experience. So it seems that a Podemos government would be based on a sort of technocratic elite, made immune by both ideology and direct control by the electorate from the temptations to adapt, if not betray, that have befallen so many previous would-be reformers in parliamentary institutions around the world.[31]

Within this context must be seen Iglesias's insistence on the rule of law and patriotism as central to turning round the effects of crisis and austerity. As seen, Podemos intends to debate its economic proposals with employers as well as the unions. On exactly how the rich would be made to pay higher taxes, or pay them at all in some cases, Iglesias explains:

It is normal that [big business] want the PP to win…but when we sit down and explain to them that one of the keys to prosperity is reducing inequality and having resources to carry out [policies] of expansion, the large firms are going to understand that it is much easier to do business in a prosperous country than in a country that is sinking… I am convinced that they are going to understand without any type of scandal, [that] they are going to reconsider".[32]

Elsewhere Iglesias stresses that winning an election is not the same as taking power.[33] So such apparently innocent declarations could be seen as part of Iglesias and his closest collaborators' strategy to win popular support on the basis of what is effectively "common sense". Faced with the reality of a capitalist class refusing to comply with its patriotic duty the people's government would then be justified, and justified in the eyes of the electorate, to, for example, expropriate the offenders' wealth and property. Shades of the left "populist" governments of Venezuela and Bolivia are clearly visible in such an approach. First it is necessary to get into power; then the people will be moulded ("building the people") into a new, albeit passive, "democratic" subject. Of course, reality might prove a bit more stubborn.

By denying the relevance of the left-right divide in politics it is easy to overlook, or at least not consider that there is any connection with, past failures of the reformist left. Instead we are in an idealised "post-Marxist" world where the institutions of bourgeois democracy appear to take on an autonomous function; the "right" people and the right structures are capable of separating these institutions off from the capitalist system as a whole. So in the world view of Podemos, or at least its leadership, class struggle, state violence and the *bourgeois* nature of the democratic state either do not exist or can be overcome without recourse to revolution from below.

In his latest book Iglesias presents a distorted view of the Marxist revolutionary alternative, presenting this as equivalent to the failed actions of small armed groups such as the Red Army Faction in Germany or of ETA in the Basque Country. In contrast, he defends what he claims is the only option for change, a would-be Gramscian strategy of reform as a game of chess. Marxists such as Lenin were supposedly in favour of "conquering the state" rather than smashing it and replacing it with a new workers' state. It is probably no coincidence that in his summary of Spanish history he manages to speak of the civil war without making any mention at all of the workers' revolution of 1936.[34]

Finally, there is the problem that Podemos, even if it received more votes than any other party in next year's election, would probably not win a working majority so it is hard to see how the new party will not end up in an alliance with the PSOE if it wants to form, in its own words, a "progressive government". The only other majority would be a Greek-style coalition of the PP and PSOE[35] and that would surely guarantee the PSOE follows the path of Pasok into near oblivion. On the other hand, any pact with a "regime" party like the PSOE could spell the death of Podemos.

The left and Podemos

With the tight control of Iglesias and his supporters over Podemos and its rapid slide into social democracy, it is reasonable to ask if this is an arena where the revolutionary left should intervene. To respond to this question it is necessary to look beyond what Podemos represents on a formal level and appreciate its role in a context of leftward shifting class consciousness on the back of years of defeats for the working class. The rapid transformation of Podemos from the political expression of the democratic storm of the 15-M to a new form of reformist party controlled tightly from above has meant that it is hard to comprehend fully the dynamics at work.

Defining the exact nature of Podemos's activist base is therefore not a straightforward task. The huge growth around a deliberately ambiguous political programme has produced circles, a thousand or so to date, which vary greatly in composition, even between different neighbourhoods of the same city.

While it is true that the 15-M movement was a direct inspiration to Podemos and its promoters and many activists were involved in it, the new party is not in any sense based primarily on this milieu. Indeed some former 15-M activists were resentful of the launch of Podemos, viewing it as an imposition from above. Podemos captured the spirit of the 15-M movement and at the same time contains at its heart a direct criticism of its excessive procrastination and lack of clear concrete goals. In fact, huge swathes of the base of Podemos are people who have not been political activists before. To this can be added disenchanted former PSOE or IU members and people who were active in the convulsions of the transition during the 1970s and then became disaffected and dropped out of activity. Among this multitude the organised anti-capitalist left is a very small minority.

Podemos's rightward drift as elections approach is by no means clear to the thousands of people who have thrown themselves into the project because they believe in a clear break with the old political regime and, mostly, believe that the newly elected leadership of Podemos intends to carry this through. As MEP Teresa Rodríguez puts it: "Podemos has become the hope of many people, not a hope, but the hope, [it is] what is left for our generation, what we can tell our grandchildren [about] as a great feat, as a failure or as a betrayal".[36]

So how the anti-capitalist left deals with the massive illusions in Iglesias and his party is not a secondary question. Clever denunciations of reformism are no more useful than sectarian disdain. What is needed is engagement with the hopes that so many people hold in Podemos with practical proposals to extend the party's influence and activity. Above all, the struggle for the circles to have a

real influence over both policy and the activities of the elected representatives will continue. In this sense the call for mobilisations to continue parallel to electoral activity is central—mobilisations which, at best, the party leadership see as secondary to its electoral intervention.

It would also be a mistake to underestimate the effect of Podemos's entrance into representative institutions. This would provide a massive boost for everybody who wants real change. United Left and other minority parties, who have been more or less alone in parliament in their denunciations of the ravages of neoliberalism and corruption, will be joined by a far larger group of young and articulate MPs, some at least activists from the PAH and other new social movements.

If a Podemos government were to be formed, mobilisation would be equally important to exert pressure to ensure the promised reforms were carried out. Likewise, if a Podemos government starts to betray the hopes of its voters, a confident active base will be essential to exert pressure from below, and, in the worst case scenario, be able to win an audience with sections of the party's supporters and avoid them falling into passivity or veering to the right. If such an intervention is carried out with sensitivity but clarity, at the same time as making a real contribution to the project, the anti-capitalist left can win far wider support than it enjoys today.

Notes

1: From receiving a combined vote of around 80 percent for over 30 years, recent polls have the PSOE and PP on under 50 percent. Latest figures, published on 24 November, show Podemos on 28.3 percent, PP 26.3 percent and PSOE 20 percent.

2: Izquierda Anticapitalista, 2014.

3: A third of its potential voters previously voted for the PSOE; and 17 percent for the PP-El Pais, 1 December 2014.

4: Público, 2 November 2014.

5: Durgan and Sans, 2011.

6: The CCOO (Comsiones Obreras-Workers' Commissions) was formerly led by the Communist Party; the UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores) union federation is associated with PSOE.

7: Errejón, 2014b.

8: Rivero, 2014, p96; also see Pastor, 2014.

9: Pablo Iglesias (video).

10: Errejón, 2014b; Iglesias claimed he was putting words to what people think and what was needed to be said-Rivero, 2014, p98.

11: Errejón, 2014b.

12: Podemos's two principal ideologues, Íñigo Errejón and Juan Carlos Monedero, have spent time in Latin America; Errejón was in Bolivia working on his thesis on the MAS (Movement for Socialism); Monedero worked in Venezuela as an advisor for Chávez's government. For an example of Iglesias on the importance as a model of the Equadorian government see Rivero, 2014, p111.

13: Errejon, 2014b.

14: Errejón, 2014a.

15: Pascual Serrano cited in Stobart, 2014.

16: Most clearly expressed in Errejón, 2014a, and Iglesias, 2014, pp34-36, 48; see Harman, 2007, for a critique of this interpretation of Gramsci's thought.

17: The term "caste" was popularised by the Italian journalists Sergio Rizzo and Gian Antonio Stella in reference to how politics in their country had been colonised by business people-Rivero, 2014, p148; Rizzo and Stella, 2007.

18: Cited in Stobart, 2014.

19: Arellano Ortiz, 2012.

20: Stobart, 2014.

21: Errejón, 2014b.

22: On these debates see Villaverde, 2014, and Castillo, 2014.

23: Rivero, 2014, p75.

24: López de Miguel, 2014.

25: Pablo Iglesias (video). The New Economic Policy, adopted by the ruling Bolsheviks in early 1921, was explicitly presented by Lenin as a retreat designed to conciliate the peasant majority by reviving market mechanisms.

26: Iglesias, 2014.

27: Syriza is major point of reference for Iglesias and his collaborators; Syriza's Alexis Tsipras was a key speaker at a rally to announce leadership election results; he also writes the introduction to Iglesias, 2014.

28: Cited in Rivero, 2014, p51.

29: Bayo and López de Miguel, 2014.

30: Castro and Pais Beiro, 2014.

31: Errejón: "We are providing ourselves the mechanisms to not commit the same errors and that does not mean we won't commit mistakes… What we can do is fulfill with an [ethical code] that reminds us where we are, that you cannot be on the side of those below and those above at the same time", López de Miguel, 2014.

32: Bayo and López de Miguel, 2014.

33: Iglesias, 2014, pp171-176.

34: Iglesias, 2014, pp36-41, 95-97.

35: An alliance of this kind was already being considered within both parties in 2012 according to El Pais, see Rivero, 2014, p24.

36: Rodríguez, 2014.

References

Arellano Ortiz, Fernando, 2012, “El populismo en América Latina está creando nuevas formas de legitimidad política” (2 June), www.vientosur.info/spip.php?article6621

Bayo, Carlos Enrique, and Alejandro López de Miguel, 2014, “Pablo Iglesias: ‘Vamos a construir un Gobierno de los mejores’”, *Público* (15 November), http://tinyurl.com/kxcztcv

Castillo, Jesús, 2014, “Triangulando el juego: Podemos, instituciones y movimientos”, *La Hiedra*, number 10 (September), http://tinyurl.com/q8vhblk

Castro, Irene, and Mario Pais Beiro, 2014, “Quién es quién de la lista de Pablo Iglesias para dirigir Podemos”, *Diario* (10 November), http://tinyurl.com/q7e46gt

Durgan, Andy, and Joel Sans, 2011, “’No One Represents Us’: the 15 May Movement in the Spanish State”, *International Socialism 132* (autumn), www.isj.org.uk/?id=757

Errejón, Íñigo, 2014a, “Muere Ernesto Laclau, teórico de la hegemonía”, *Público* (14 April), www.publico.es/514300/muere-ernesto-laclau-teorico-de-la-hegemonia

Errejón, Íñigo, 2014b, “Spain’s Podemos: An inside view of a radical left sensation”, *Links*: *International Journal of Socialist Renewal* (15 July), http://links.org.au/node/3969

Harman, Chris, 2007, “Gramsci, the *Prison Notebooks* and Philosophy”, *International Socialism 114* (spring), www.isj.org.uk/?id=308

Iglesias, Pablo, 2014, *Disputar la Democracia* (Akal).

Izquierda Anticapitalista, 2014, “Izquierda Anticapitalista ante los acuerdos de la Asamblea Ciudadana de Podemos” (5 November), www.anticapitalistas.org/spip.php?article30086

López de Miguel, Alejandro, 2014, “Entrevista con Iñigo Errejón: Vamos a construir una maquina de guerra electoral” *Público* (23 October), http://tinyurl.com/q2xby7b

Pastor, Jaime, 2014, “Partidos, elecciones y Podemos”, *Viento Sur* (14 October), www.vientosur.info/spip.php?article9481

Rivero, Jacobo, 2014, *Conversación con Pablo Iglesias* (Akal).

Rizzo, Sergio, and Gian Antonio Stella, 2007, *La casta*: *Così i politici italiani sono diventati intoccabili* (Biblioteca Univerzale Rizzoli).

Rodríguez, Teresa, 2014, “¿Podemos se rompe?” *Público* (24 October), http://blogs.publico.es/lo-queremos-todo/2014/10/24/podemos-se-rompe/

Stobart, Luke, 2014, “Understanding Podemos (1/3): 15-M & counter-politics”, *Left Flank* (5 November), http://tinyurl.com/pcfc45t

Villaverde, Ana, 2014, “¿Qué democracia interna para Podemos?” *La Hiedra*, number 10 (September), http://lahiedra.info/que-democracia-interna-para-podemos/

Reposted with permission from the journal International Socialism, no. 145.