Travel Notes: Impressions of the Left in Madrid

written by Dan La Botz | April 21, 2016

In Madrid to give a talk on American politics and the Bernie Sanders campaign at , I took time to meet and converse with some young organizers of Anticapitalistas and one longtime leader of the left who had to go into exile toward the end of the years of the Franco dictatorship.

Spain, like much of the world, entered a new period with the economic crisis of 2008. In May 15, 2011, the *Indignados* and the *movimiento de plazas* grabbed the attention of the Spain and of the world. When the movement began to recede, Pablo Iglesias and his political team and Izquierda Anticapitalista joined forces to create Podemos. In May of 2014, Podemos succeeded in electing five European Parliament representatives. The two major parties each won less than 50%, creating what is described here as *la crisis del partidismo*, that is, the crisis of the two-party system. At about the same time, because of financial scandals, both the King and his son abdicated, as other financial scandals swirled around the Popular Party (PP) and the Socialist Workers Party of Spain (PSOE), the social democratic party.

The question was, what kind of party would Podemos be? Pablo Iglesias, a charismatic leader, tended to turn it into a Latin American style populist party, which meant a top-down internal organization. Anticapitalistas fights for a democratic, pluralistic party, based on the *círculos*, the circles organized in the towns and in the barrios of the large cities on which Podemos is based.

There have been a series of elections in the states and municipalities, though in the September 27, 2015 election Pablo Iglesias made a mistake by trying to put the social question ahead of the national question in Catalunya. Now having recognized that mistake Iglesias has adopted the concept of the state of Spain as being pluri-national in character. At the same time, a new party appeared on the right, Ciudadanos, a kind of conservative mirror image of Podemos.

Anticapitalists, the young organizers explain to me, has about 700 members of whom 30 percent are women. The average age of activists is around 30 years; 70 percent of the organization they estimate is under 40. The organization has grown through its involvement in the social movements, and the organizers are proud of the fact that they are the ones known for their ability to organize and mobilize social protests.

Yet the group that has grown rapidly doesn't have enough cadres, that is, experienced leaders. This makes education of new members particularly important. While this organization has its roots in the

old left, it has attempted to break with the old-style indoctrination once common on the left. They organize their educationals as discussions of article from *Viento Sur*, the Spanish socialist magazine and website for which I write.

In the evening I spoke at the monthly *Viento Sur* forum held at the beautiful *Traficante de Sueños* (Dream-Dealers) bookstore on the topic of American politics and the Bernie Sanders campaign. A well informed audience asked all of the most important questions.