

Deepening Economic and Social Crisis: Will Indignation Salvage Spain?

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Indignation is the catch phrase in Spain these days, most feel it and most express it, but the collective shouting seems to fall into a vacuum that can soon lead to despair. Much has been said about the popular-uprising taking place in Spain as a lead up to the regional and local elections. With citizens camped in city squares across the country, many feel this is the beginning of a much anticipated 'European summer' of discontent in which the people of Europe following the example set by Arab streets, take their turn in demanding democracy, justice and peace. Some commentary on the Internet has even begun to point to the possibility of a 'North American Fall' to follow from this uprising for change; but rather than predicting what might happen in North America, this is a time for reflection and critique of what it is that might have started in Spain, and what it is that such a popular movement is going to be coming up against in the coming months.

In Spain, the elections have come and gone, with the squares full of thousands of people continuing with their shouts of indignation, but so far they have not been heard. The political party PSOE of Zapatero's ruling socialist government has taken a beating, but the formal democracy in which we live has not changed, and the centre-right Partido Popular has taken control of much of the country. What this means, according to most market analysts, is that as the new administrations take control of regional and local governments, previously undeclared debt will surface making Spain's economic reality much more dire than what has been estimated to date.

The post-election week has already begun as a sober reminder of the economic tsunami engulfing the country. The bond market has already punished Spain for the 'indignados' movement and for the election defeat of the ruling party. The stock market has also reflected doubts about the country's austerity measures, and the privatization of National corporations has continued with the announcement of the privatizing of the National lottery and a couple of the country's airports. In addition, the Popular Party (PP) has made repeated calls for an early general election in which they are poised to win. Therefore, it is not naïve to state that so far the popular uprising has helped consolidate the centre-right as the people's choice for spearheading the country's return to economic growth – an economic growth which according to the PP's political program will be achieved by cutting corporate taxes, reducing public spending, easing the firing of workers, bailing out failing banks, making it harder for immigrants to stay in the country, and augmenting the securitization of Spain in order to create a stable investment environment.

In essence, the choice made by those who opted to vote, reflects the opposite solution to what is being discussed by people in the squares. This is the unpleasant reality that those in

city squares must reflect upon, if their demands are to be heard by the rest of the population. The 'indignados' want to be heard; now it is time for them to listen to the rest of the country in order to propose a truly constructive program with which the majority of the population can identify – we must move from this moment of indignation to a post-indignation space in which 'responsibility' becomes the mantra citizens embrace.

I have personally camped in the city squares and listened to the proposals made by those committee's that have already hijacked the movement. What started as a call for electoral reform and the punishing of political and economic corruption – call that indeed attracted thousands of people to the city squares – has quickly metamorphosed into some kind of Bolshevik-like political project led by the country's squatter movement. Although to those observing from the outside the calls for nonviolence and participatory democracy coming from the microphones of the committees seem to point to a truly revolutionary change, a close look from within the squares, reveals that those calls are as empty as the calls for change we are used to hearing from the country's politicians.

It is my opinion, that this hijacking of a truly democratic uprising – inspired by a general indignation and glued together through solidarity – has already caused great damage to this spontaneous call for change. Of course it is difficult to put forth clear proposals when thousands of people find themselves on the streets, it is obvious, that in such situations groups with organizing capacity are going to take charge in the steering of the movement, but just because a group has the ability to organize meals, public toilets, and speaking engagements in a public square, it does not mean it has the ability to lead over the discontent of a mass of people. Sadly, those who called for the squares to be filled, do not seem to understand this, and their mistake, I think has already begun to demobilize those whose indignation is not only aimed at the actions of politicians and bankers, but is also aimed at the actions of the committees taking control of the squares. Hopefully, these committees will realize that the best option for the movement today, is for them to turn the microphones away from themselves, and hand them down, to those filling the squares asking for some form of real democracy.

Unless one thinks that the calls of indignation are going to be met by a centre-right government, it seems apparent that indignation is not salvaging Spain. Therefore, if we – the people in the squares – are to gain true democracy while avoiding the International Monetary Fund from 'salvaging' our country through a Greek style bailout and its subsequent debt restructuring, we must act responsibly and acknowledge that we need the majority of the country to rally behind our calls for change. This only seems possible, once we critique our own actions, correct our mistakes, and stop proposing utopian ideals through undemocratic means, and instead offer real solutions through truly participatory democracy.

Pablo Ouziel's articles and essays are available at pabloouziel.com

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