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Spain: Social Mobilization of the Left and the Constituent Process in Catalonia

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Nobody said that it would be easy, but it is necessary to try. And this is precisely what is being done through the Constituent Process in Catalonia, led by the Benedictine nun Teresa Forcades and the economist Arcadi Oliveres, along with many other people. To create social consciousness, to mobilize, to promote civil disobedience and to raise a political alternative that defies those who monopolize power.

Its objective is to construct a new politico-social instrument, based on popular self-organization, loyal to those of at the bottom and able to contribute, in diversity, to the social and political left as a whole. On the horizon, if things work out, it expresses the will to compete in the next elections to the Catalan Parliament, with a broad candidacy, the result of the necessary confluence of many people, some currently inside and others outside the Process, that aspires to transform social discontent into a political majority and to establish the bases to promote a constituent process, that allows us to collectively equip ourselves with a new political framework in the service of the majority.

Some will say that this is utopian, but it is more utopian, from my point of view, to think that those who have led to us to the present situation of crisis, from which, by the way, they obtain substantial benefits, will get us out of it. Breaking with scepticism, apathy and fear is the challenge that we have ahead. Knowledge that “we can” is the first step to obtaining concrete victories.

Ever since the Constituent Process went public last April, the support received has been wide The Process has connected with broad sectors of society who perceive, in the present context of crisis, the urgent necessity of changing things. Many people without too much political or organizational experience have identified with a discourse that appeals to something as essential as can be: justice.

Other social activists have seen in the Process an instrument to go beyond social mobilization per se and to consider a political-organizational perspective of change. Two years after the emergency of 15M, many perceive that no matter how much we occupy banks, empty houses, supermarkets, hospitals… those in power continue applying a series of measures that sink us into absolute misery. Resting on the essential struggle on the street, without which there is no possible change, the Constituent Process raises, at the same time, a challenge to the political-economic regime, as well as in the institutions. And to change the system by “occupying” these instances and giving them back to the social majority via a constituent process.

For sure there are no magical formulas but experiences like the constituent processes in

Latin America (Ecuador, Bolivia, or Venezuela) or, closer to home, Iceland, in spite of their debatable evolutions, are experiences to consider deeply, not to imitate but to learn from their successes and errors. In Catalonia, the debate on the national question and independence opens an opportunity, as we could never have imagined, to be able to decide… and to decide on everything.

High participation

The high participation in public presentations of the Constituent Process, some led by Teresa Forcades and others by Arcadi Oliveres, with an average of between 400 to 700 people in municipalities like Vic, Sabadell, Santa Coloma de Gramenet, Lleida, Girona, Vilanova i la Geltrú, Balaguer, Figueres, Blanes, Granollers, Terrassa, or even small municipalities like Santa Fe del Penedès or Fals, shows the capacity of attraction of this initiative, which has, in a few months, made more than one hundred presentations across the Catalan territory.

And more importantly, the interest of those who approach the Process does not reside only in listening to its two main promoters but in participating actively in the construction of this politico-social instrument. In this way, more than 80 local assemblies have already been set up across Catalonia. Also specific assemblies around such issues as education, health, feminism and immigration have started up. All of them are coordinated in a general assembly known as the Promotional Group, which meets monthly.

The forms of action of the Constituent Process also reflect this “other politics”. At most public events makeshift money boxes are passed around to collect what it costs to rent the PA apparatus, photocopies and so on. The presentations serve also to attract those present to attending local meetings and assemblies. The groups in the territory are organized according to their own priorities and are coordinated nationally. The Constituent Process still has some way to go, but it shows the potential of a political initiative able to connect with major social unrest. Although obviously there is still much to be done, perhaps the most difficult part: to consolidate the process and improve the coordination of the assemblies. This is a work in progress.

From bottom to top

The confidence generated by its principal promoters, Teresa Forcades and Arcadi Oliveres, is key to its success. But we know that this is an initiative that will only succeed if it is built from the bottom up. I was told the day both presented the proposal: “We two alone cannot do much”. Correct. Today, the Constituent Process has more than 44,000 people attached and multiple local and sector meetings. Teresa Forcades and Arcadi Oliveres, as has been said many times, do not want to be leaders of anything, but agree to put their credibility at the service of a just cause.

Criticisms of the Christian profile of both have been made, despite the secular nature of the Process. Which in part is not surprising. The social mobilization of the left, both in Catalonia and in the Spanish state, would not be understood, in part, without the contribution of ordinary Christians. Without going any further, one of the founders of the Field Workers Union was none other than the priest of the poor, Diamantino Garcia. Denying this reality means ignoring this part of our collective history. And both Teresa Forcades and Arcadi Oliveres have spoken repeatedly and at length before the Constituent Process, against the

ecclesiastical hierarchy, for the separation of church and state and in defence of the right of women to decide on their bodies. Which, incidentally, has earned them widespread criticism by reactionary sectors of the church and its hierarchy.

Last October 13, the main event of the Constituent Process was being held in Barcelona, just six months after its introduction. I still remember how before the proposal someone commented: “Why go ahead with such a project. This is going to fail”. A colleague said: “Failure would be not to try.” How right she was.

*Translated by International View Point.

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