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The hope of the democratic monster, between Syriza and Podemos

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"A spectre is haunting Europe". The Italian newspaper *Il Manifesto* used this headline a few days ago for its homepage, commenting on the visits of Tsipras and Varoufakis to European governments. A real nightmare for the ordoliberal Germans, a *Geisterfahrer*, to be precise, a suicidal conductor looking to collide with the European bus, as *Der Spiegel* described on its front page. Imagine what could happen with the victory of Podemos in Spain: what a magnificent spectre would then be seen lurking about, a real monster created by the exploited and the productive forces of the fourth European economy! In just a few weeks, election rounds will begin in Spain, and the mantra of the European governments will be repeated, with double the force, in an attempt to frighten Spanish citizens. Let us prepare ourselves. With the certainty that the arrogance of the bad omens of this propaganda will be defeated. But in the

meantime, let us prepare ourselves: What could Podemos say about Europe?

Conscious of the temporal and political acceleration that the victory of Syriza has imposed, the discourse of Podemos on Europe is, on the one hand, informed by a sincere solidarity and high regard for the victory of the democrats in Greece, while it consists, on the other hand, in prudent judgment – Tsipras' line could fail in the brief interval that separates it from the Spanish elections. But prudency is not the same as ambiguity. Indeed, it is obvious that nothing would be more dangerous than an ambiguous position, not only with respect to the negotiation that has been started between Greece and Europe, but above all with respect to the policies promoted until now by the Europe of the Troika. Any ambiguity on this point must be eliminated – and so it has been in practice, if we are to judge based on what we have seen in recent months: two Europes exist and it is necessary to position oneself in one or the other. The knowing population is aware that to win in Europe is possible only in light of a front already opened by Syriza that now has to expand in Europe. The politics of debt, issues related to sovereignty and the Atlantic question can only be considered in the European space.

It was expected that there would be great attentiveness – and so we begin to test it – to the tactical proposals and the politics of the economic-financial team of Syriza. Irrespective of value judgments about the proposals, they signaled a plan for transnational cooperation and an abandonment of the anti-European demagoguery of the "old" leftists, a demagoguery that, in any case, has never been strong in Podemos. Of course, Syriza's bet is formulated in terms of defending national sovereignty ("against the Troika", "against Merkel", etc.), but in practice it implies a fairly evident acceptance of a political intervention *within* and *against* the

Union as it is currently directed. In this sense, the primary option now is that of a coalition of the PIIGS and the forces of a new left to overturn the status quo of the Union. At the same time, this appears to be the only option available to Podemos for winning the elections.

Let us try to consider things in more depth. Until now the confrontation in Europe has taken shape between a neo-Bismarckian Europe, neoliberal and fundamentally conservative, and a democratic Europe, constituent and fundamentally attentive to the needs of workers, impoverished middle classes and precarious or unemployed youth, women, immigrants and refugees – the excluded, old and new. An alternative so to speak, because departing from the crisis of 2008, the Bismarckian Europe imposed itself forcefully, leaving for the other Europe a marginal space, of protest and at times even cries of despair. Nevertheless, when the situation appeared to remain strictly closed for the claims of justice and the revolts against misery, the alternative presented itself – starting in Greece. Now the task is to affirm it and organize it precisely in the areas where a reactionary initiative has imposed itself – where the attempt has been made to drown Hercules from popular rescue.

The first question, the first difficulty, is that of debt. The Europe of the Troika wants to make the European multitudes pay the debt, and the ability to pay this debt becomes the yardstick of democracy and the degree of Europeanism. But all those who are moving in a democratic front think, on the contrary, that this yardstick is insulting because the debts charged to the people today were in fact incurred by those who governed over the years. These debts have fattened the ruling classes, not only through corruption, tax evasion or fiscal favors, insane arms expenditures and industrial policies that do not benefit labor, but moreover by subjecting it to

the logic of financial rent and imposing precarity and suffocating uncertainty on forms of life. Each man, each woman, each worker has had to plead guilty of a debt, of a financial gravamen for which they were not responsible. The moment has arrived to say aloud that it was not the citizens, but the masters of power, the men of the neoliberal project, the politics of the "center", of the "grand coalitions" – more extreme and exclusive each time – it has been they who have created a debt from which they have appropriated for themselves and for which they are demanding an undue refund. Against this servile condition for the people (not only for the people of the South of Europe, but also those of Central Europe and all of Eastern Europe) the new left, through Syriza, is asking for rescue – a European conference on debt, that is, a constituent venue for a new system of solidarity, for the establishment of new criteria of measurement and fiscal cooperation and for labor policies. Podemos can bring huge support to this project. We all know that behind these topics lies a project of deep transformation of social relations. One more time, of Europe and in Europe a project of liberty, of equality, of solidarity – a project that we can call antifascist, because it repeats the passion and the force of the struggles of the Resistance. The alliance between Podemos and Syriza, and the impulse to merge into this alliance addressed to all of the new European lefts, can construct a model – a model for a democratic Union, based on solidarity beyond and against the market. Departing from this foundation, the only fiscal policy that can be made is one of reducing or abolishing the debt that has been consolidated until now and establishing and standardizing, for the future, progressive fiscal criteria in the whole Eurozone. The central themes of the welfare state – education, medical assistance, pension systems and housing policies, but also domestic labor and care work – can be developed uniformly at the European level, accompanying the great innovation of a decent basic income,

generalized and uniform. All of this opens a constituent battle in those places where new rights of solidarity can be recognized, where the *common* becomes a central element of social-economic organization.

But to win on these issues requires indicating the field of struggle: this only can be the European space in its totality. Which brings us to the central topic, around which many misunderstandings have accumulated: the cession of sovereignty. There have already been transfers of sovereignty, and these have always been made in favor of the neo-Bismarckian powers of financial capitalism. Demagogically attacking these cessions of sovereignty, nationalist rights are being born and developing dangerously in Europe. And yet it is strange how these positions can sometimes be made out (or that they are regarded with favor) amongst members of Syriza, Podemos and other forces of the "new Europe" that is forming. We must be clear on this point: each of the countries that has entered the Union, and even more so those that have entered the Euro, no longer have full sovereignty. And this is good, for it was behind national sovereignty that each and every one of the tragedies of modernity unfurled. If we want to continue speaking of sovereignty in a modern (and classical) sense, that is to say, of a power "in the last instance", we must be clear that this is increasingly identified with Frankfurt, with the tower of the ECB. Our situation is characterized by the reign of a dangerous duplicity. We must recognize this: we need Frankfurt, a European currency, if we do not want to fall prey to the powers of global finance, to the politics of the United States or other continental giants that are asserting themselves against Europe; but we must also recover Frankfurt for democracy, to impose on it the reasoning of the people – and Frankfurt should be stormed by Europe: first by the movements and then, gradually, by the majority of the European democracies

and by a European Parliament transformed into a *constituent assembly*. With globalization the centrality of a monetary governance of continental zones was imposed everywhere – and Europe is one of these continental zones. It is impossible to imagine a political battle more essential than that leading towards democratic control of the European currency. This is the storming of the Bastille today.

Moreover, it is clear that merely raising the issue of control over the monetary and political vertex of Europe, and insisting on the dissolution of the old monocratic sovereignties could open up, in a productive manner, the topic of federalism, which is another essential step in the construction of a new Europe. Federalism: not only one that wants the European nations to recompose themselves in a constituent dialogue, but also, and above all, an articulation of all the nations, of all the populations and languages that want to feel culturally and politically autonomous, within a unitary framework, that is to say, a federal one. It is not only the PIIGS who want this; there are Scotland, Catalonia, the Basque Country and all the other regions that demand autonomy and an effective ability to decide on their social and political constitution. Federalism will be a key to the construction of Europe. The issue of sovereignty can only be raised and used in terms of plurality, subscribing to the dynamics that articulate a forthright federalism for the years to come.

Here we see once again that only the left – the new left that departs from the democratic radicality of the emerging movements of struggle and organizes itself along emancipatory lines (Syriza and Podemos) – can impose the European Union not as an instrument of dominion but as a democratic goal. *Left-Europe-democratic radicality*: this dispositive is becoming increasingly important for defining the defense of working-class interests and for

emancipation of the population from poverty. There is a long and dirty tradition of left-sovereigntists that must be ended, just as we must defeat the populist experiences that use national sentiments and transform them into fascist (nationalist, identitarian, isolationist) impulses. Only a europeanist left, deeply transformed by the democratic radicality of the emergent movements against austerity, can construct a democratic Europe.

Here, another problem emerges, which we can call the "Atlantic question" – it is a problem often evaded or excluded from debate, as if it were obvious that the process of European unification must necessarily develop under the watchful protection of the United States of America. Europe was promoted within the antifascist Resistance in order to overcome the wars that until the middle of the century had destroyed it and impoverished and humiliated its populations. Against this condition, the first elements of a European discourse were construed during the post-war era in Europe and during the *transición* in Spain, with the knowledge that peace signified the possibility of democracy, whereas war has always signified fascism and militarism. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, European unity also lost its characteristic as a last front against the Soviet world and Russian expansionism. In this way, the goal of a European Union has re-centered and re-organized itself around a framework of civilization, own juridical structures and autonomy in a global environment.

But now Europe is surrounded by wars. The entire Mediterranean, deeply integrated not only to the south, but also to all of Europe by movements of migration and critical relationships of energy policy and commercial exchange, is crossed by a single line of war, by fascisms and dictatorships. It is a line that extends all the way to the Middle East and makes Europe an actor dangerously exposed to armed movements that are of global importance and have global

leadership. Furthermore, on the Eastern border of Europe a senseless war is developing between Russian-speaking populations, with responsibilities that should be referred to questions of global control that contradict the interests of European populations. From this perspective, the sovereignty of Europe – no longer the imagined sovereignty of each country, but the real sovereignty of a Union that is constructing itself – is projected onto NATO and usurped by it. This is the true cession of sovereignty borne by the European populations! When Tsipras poses, in a symbolic manner, the necessity of dealing with this problem, he touches on a fundamental seam of the European structures. In so doing he introduces a problem to which we should respond, without putting ourselves under the illusion that it could be resolved immediately, but also without negating its existence and its central impact. What we refer to is the relationship of the Union with peace or war, with a peace not only inside Europe, but also at its borders. Moreover, it is immediately clear that the Atlantic question is not a problem concerning only peace and war: it is an issue of peace and war tracing back to the system of control and/or of command over the productive and financial structures of Europe itself.

In order to not be hypocritical, to speak clearly and to give further impetus to the processes of constructing a political force of the European left, we will again put some questions on the table that cannot be left unasked. What does Podemos say or do about immigration, about refugees? But also – repeating ourselves and making our question more precise – about NATO, about the regional conflicts underway in the *limes* of the Union? If these topics are considered "misfires" in the electoral realm, is it necessary to avoid them and/or to respond with rhetorical exercises to get by? No, not at all: it is very difficult to adopt the slogan "first we take power, then we discuss the program" in this domain.

The topics of peace and war cannot be considered secondary. To take positions on them means to unambiguously clarify the fundamental orientation of the group leading Podemos not only with respect to questions of peace and war, but also on issues that refer to reform and a constituent project that affects all of Europe. The courage and seriousness with which Tsipras has laid out the whole context of topics that are now important for the construction of a Europe outside of the Troika are the same that can allow us to also outline a dispositive "outside of NATO". The movements and governments of a new left know that they have to take on these issues as central. Without ambiguities and conscious that the same global conjuncture can now contribute to their solution. In fact, what the citizens of the world are asking for at this point is a democratic Europe in an ensemble of the new global reality, because Europe is seen as a reality that can renew a democratic tradition with a long trajectory, taking advantage of the light that Syriza and Podemos have lit, as hope for reform and moving beyond capitalism.

The European movements want to be included in the continental political initiative that the Podemos-Syriza axis can create/is creating in the European space. This initiative constitutes in particular a point of attraction for the new lefts and the new democratic radicality in formation in the south of the Union. The rhythm as much as the degree of articulation of this process will depend on the current course of the government of Syriza and on the electoral success of Podemos. We all can (*podemos*) organize a constituent rupture in the European space.