

Growing Unemployment, Rising Poverty: Spain's People's Movement

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Spain's people's movement has finally awoken, la Puerta del Sol in Madrid is now the country's Tahrir Square, and the 'Arab Spring' has been joined by what is now bracing to become a long 'European Summer'. As people across the Arab world continue their popular struggle for justice, peace and democracy, Spain's disillusioned citizens have finally caught on with full force. Slow at first, hopeful that Spain's dire economic conditions would magically correct themselves, the Spanish street has finally understood that democratic and economic justice and peace will not come from the pulpits of the country's corrupt political elite.

Amidst local and regional election campaigns, with the banners of the different political parties plastered across the country's streets, people are saying 'enough!' Disillusioned youth, unemployed, pensioners, students, immigrants and other disenfranchised groups have emulated their brothers in the Arab world and are now demanding a voice - demanding an opportunity to live with dignity.

As the country continues to explode economically, with unemployment growing incessantly - one in two young people unemployed across many of the country's regions. With many in the crumbling middle class on the verge of losing their homes while bankers profit from their loss and the government uses citizen taxes to expand the military industrial complex by going off to war; the people have grasped that they only have each other if they are to rise from the debris of the militarized political and economic nightmare in which they have found themselves.

Spain is finally re-embracing its radical past, its popular movements, its anarcho-syndicalist traditions and its republican dreams. Crushed by Generalissimo Francisco Franco seventy years ago, it seemed that Spanish popular culture would never recover from the void left by a rightwing dictatorship, which exterminated anyone with a dissenting voice; but the 15th of May 2011, is the reminder to those in power that Spanish direct democracy is still alive and has finally awoken.

In the 1970's a transition through pact, transformed Spain's totalitarian structures into a representative democracy in which all the economic structures remained intact. For the highly illiterate generations of the time, marred in the reality of a poverty-stricken country, the concessions made by the country's elite seemed something worth celebrating. Nevertheless, as the decades passed, the state-owned corporations were privatized robbing the nation of its collective wealth, and the political scene crystallized into a pseudo-democracy in which two large parties PP and PSOE marginalized truly democratic alternatives. As this neoliberal political project materialized, the discontent begun to

resurface, but the fear mongers, Spain's baby-boomers who had once fought for democracy, were quick to remind the youth of the dangers of rebellion. For many decades in Spain, the mantra was, 'it is better to live as we are than to go back to the totalitarianism of the past, and if you shake the system too much, it will take away our hard-earned rights'. So the youth remained silent, fearful of what could happen if they spoke, and the baby-boomers in their content blamed the youth for their indifference. According to them, it was the youth unwilling to work, which were bringing the country to its knees. But the youth have stopped this blame game, and aware of the true risks to their future are finally enticing the whole country to mobilize.

A failed European project, with its borders quickly being reinstated, a collapsing Euro currency, and the examples of Greece, Portugal and Ireland are the reminders to those on the streets of what it is they are fighting to disassociate themselves from, and of the freedoms they are working towards. The economic and political project of the country's elite has destroyed the economic dreams of whole generations of naïve and apathetic Spaniards; it has left the country in the hands of bond speculators and central bankers, and Spaniards will have to pay that price. Nevertheless, the debt accumulated by the Spanish family, has also earned it the education with which it can understand what is going on, and through it Spanish people will liberate themselves from the tyranny of their government.

What has begun in Madrid's Puerta del Sol and has been echoed in fifty-two cities across the country is the crystallization of a popular movement for freedom, which has no intention of fading away. The people have no choice, either they take city squares as symbols of their struggle, or their message is never heard. The government knows this and that is why it has quickly responded by trying to disperse the crowds with its repressive police force, but following some arrests, the people are back with more strength.

A silent revolution has begun in Spain, a nonviolent revolution which seeks democracy through democratic means, justice through just means, and peace through peaceful means has finally captivated the imagination of the Spanish people, and now there is no turning back. The challenge ahead will be in keeping the collective spirit nonviolent as the police force does everything in its power to disintegrate the movement into a violent chaos that can justify its repression. The popular movement will also have to be alert as the bond speculators threaten the country with economic sanctions in order to scare the population into submission, and a constructive program will have to be articulated so that the movement can continue to function whilst providing sustainable alternatives for a different Spain.

Hopefully an articulate steering committee will flourish soon from amongst the crowds, which is capable of making clear and viable demands that grab the imagination of the country and force the political elite to comply. These are delicate times in Spain, if this spontaneous nonviolent movement succeeds, Spain may welcome a brighter future, if it fails, I fear violence will become the only option for those in pain. What those outside of the country can do for Spain is to echo the shouts of indignation coming from the country's streets. So far both mainstream and progressive international media channels have opted for silence. Let us hope this silence breaks.

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

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