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Counterpunch. Retrieved 5 April, 2013 from http://www.counterpunch.org/2011/06/07/spanish-revolution-at-a-crossroads/

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aspect, as people begin to join or form neighborhood assemblies, which are holding weekly meetings in a central plaza in their respective neighborhoods. These meetings end in noise demos, protests, blockades of major avenues, or other actions more dynamic than those that came out of the central assembly in Plaça Catalunya.

In every period of mass indignation and rebellion, easy solutions offering false promises will be the ones that circulate the most widely. Taking advantage of populist rhetoric and the very values encouraged by the current system, these solutions tend to coalesce in superficial movements that squander the collective outrage and, at most, oblige the powerholders to change their masks. Spain, and the rest of the world, is in earnest need of a revolution, but contrary to consumer culture's demands for instant gratification, standing in a plaza with protest signs for a week, or two weeks, or a month, does not change anything. At most, it can provoke a crisis of governance that brings previously invisible conflicts to the fore. When these lines of conflict become obvious, when they charge in with clubs and rubber bullets, we must not pacify ourselves, sit down, raise our hands, and trust the journalists and lawyers to make everything okay. On the contrary, we must find the courage to trace these lines, through all obstacles, to their very sources, and then ask ourselves: are we ready to truly "change everything," as tens of thousands of people from Puerta del Sol to Plaça Catalunya shouted during the first heady days of the occupations, or do we want another placebo, to go back to the easy, albeit impoverished, life, and wait until the next crisis, the next false solution, a problem for the next generation.

on a hypersensitivity towards their public "image," they make themselves patently easy to manipulate by those same media institutions which just a generation ago were popularly considered to be the enemy. But the concept of enemies is antithetical to today's feel-good nonviolence, so these na?ve activists continue to seek common ground with the architects of public opinion, and as usual, it's those with the resources who call the shots.

In sum, the Spanish Revolution is gaining ground precisely where it exceeds the principal limitations established by the Real Democracy Now platform. In the cities where the encampments signed on to the platform from the start, participation has dropped off sharply, and the homogenized discourses rarely exceed the level of slogans. Meanwhile, in cities like Barcelona, where the platform was rejected and the occupation established an independent character from the beginning, or in Madrid, where there is also a strong antiauthoritarian presence critical of the discourses of democracy and unity, the occupations became a place for intense and multifaceted debates, carried out autonomously among hundreds of people over the course of days and weeks; a place where new theoretical texts representing various and diverging lines of thought have been written, distributed in the thousands, and argued over; a place where people have the opportunity to gain experiences of self-organization, either inside or outside the official structure. In cities where the central structure was not challenged and critiqued, it soon consolidated power, pushed out critical voices, pushed out homeless people, immigrants selling beers, or others deemed antisocial, and imploded in a spectacle of boredom as most people left rather than sitting through an umpteenth meeting in which all they could do was listen to someone else talk.

Failure, in these cases, cannot be chalked up to the usual exhaustion and burnout after the first week's excitement. The level of activity in each encampment was inversely proportionate to its level of centralization. The greater the possibility of inclusion for multiple political trajectories, multiple organizing forms and styles, and a multiplicity, rather than a unity, of proposals and initiatives, the greater and more enduring the participation. In Barcelona, this decentralization has taken on a geographical as well as a structural

Barcelona.

It started with a protest announced via Twitter, Facebook, and various listserves, scheduled for May 15, a week before the country-wide elections. Democracia Real Ya, "Real Democracy Now," was the name of the platform and its central demand. The protest took place simultaneously in dozens of cities throughout Spain. In Madrid there was a massive turnout; everywhere else it passed without incident, easily lost amidst a series of other protests that have been occurring with increasing frequency in response to the Labor Reform, social cuts, and home repossessions.

But the night of May 15 and the following day, the protests transformed into occupations of central plazas in every city where people had taken to the streets under the slogan, "real democracy now." The central principles of the Real Democracy Now platform, adopted to a greater or lesser degree in other cities outside of Madrid, were unity among people indignant at the present situation, assembly decision-making, no political parties, no ideologies, and nonviolence. The occupation movement explicitly evoked the revolts in the Arab world. With blogs and cellphones they mimicked the high-tech component that Western media identified (and exaggerated) in the popular movements in Tunisia and Egypt. But their gains on the ground were quicker and most substantial than their extension through cyberspace. Within a week, there were permanent encampments in a hundred cities throughout the Iberian peninsula, as well as numerous support actions. In Catalunya alone, 121 permanent or temporary occupations and other gatherings were reported before the elections of May 22.

Early on, police in Madrid tried to evict the occupation at Puerta del Sol, beating, arresting, and harrasing dozens of people. But the crowds only came back larger. After that, the authorities decided to adopt a cautious stance on a national scale, and in a fine bit of political farce, the Constitutional Tribunal, the Spanish supreme court, announced that a careful study of the law led them to believe the occupations could be allowed to continue through election weekend, even though holding any political protest or gathering on Election Sunday or the prior Saturday, the "Day of Reflection," is a blatant violation of the Spanish Constitution. In reality, the Constitutional

Tribunal were merely expressing a pragmatic aversion to provoking a pre-election surprise.

The elections came and went, the rightwing Populist Party picked up several strongholds of the governing center-left Socialist Workers' Party, but on the whole the two main parties lost a huge chunk of the vote, while extreme right fascist and anti-immigrant parties, or far left and Catalan or Basque independence parties gained ground. Most significantly, abstention loomed at between one-third and one-half of the electorate, while blank and null votes doubled or tripled in most districts.

The elections ended, but the encampments didn't.

Since last year's general strike on September 29, which in Barcelona turned into a veritable–if only day-long–insurrection, Spain has been alight with protests, occupations, pickets, and acts of disobedience or sabotage. Meanwhile, the system has lost its ability to constrain resistance using the usual channels, since the two major labor unions (CCOO and UGT) have signed onto the Labor Reform, a typical neoliberal austerity package that cuts education and health services, fires public sector workers, and pushes back the retirement age. Increasingly, people have been collectivizing their rage and taking action in a variety of ways that range from the spectacular to the anonymous, constituting a resistance that on the whole has been impossible to pinpoint.

Until now. The Real Democracy Now occupations have become the vessel to channel all this resistance and outrage. But as the central occupations steadily dissipate with the passing of time, internal debates are raging that have not been reflected on the outside, neither in the pedantic journalism with which the media hope to subtly patronize the movement and discipline it towards greater pragmatism, nor in the triumphant and populist manifestos broadcast throughout cyberspace. These debates mark a strategic watershed that may determine whether the structures of protest we create will be used against us, as has happened so often in the past, or whether on a general scale we can finally identify and attack the social structures responsible for the array of privations we've suffered for as long as we can remember.

discourses produced in the assembly have been confined to sloganeering. The focus on corruption rather than governing structures or social relations locates the problem in the unethical choices of politicians and bankers, rather than in the very existence of a system in which power is managed by politicians and bankers. This is a populist leader's wet dream. Any charismatic swindler promising an ethical change can turn this hard won momentum into votes. Democracy has accomplished the same bait and switch so many times in the past.

On a tactical level, the pro-democracy activists have sanitized the movement by imposing an extreme pacifism, often violently. In a cultural context where the concept of nonviolence still has room for self-defense, blockades, or the sabotage of inanimate property, a good speaker can easily win majority support for a "nonviolent occupation." Subsequently, the ideologues of pacifism have verbally or even physically attacked people attempting to block streets, have insisted that the occupation remain within the confines of the plaza, have applauded police arresting thieves or football fans, and have silenced people insulting or yelling at the police. During police actions, as when cops "cleaned up" Plaça Catalunya in Barcelona on May 27, taking away all the tents, computers, tables, kitchen, and other infrastructure, and beating all those who stood in their way, the pacifists insisted that everyone sit down and raise their hands, physically forcing many people to do so, and calling some people who refused "infiltrators." When the crowds finally surged forward and pushed out the police, the pacifists initially formed human chains trying to protect them. The crowds had to physically push through the pacifist cordon in order to eject the police from the plaza. On multiple occasions pacifists have accused the critics of nonviolence of being police provocateurs, while at other times they have glorified the police or claimed they were fellow workers only doing their jobs.

By never questioning journalists' manipulation of the term "violence," which is applied to protestors for the slightest infraction but rarely to police and never to bankers or governments, these dogmatic pacifists have turned themselves into auxiliaries for the mass media and the economic interests they represent. By basing their strategy

emergent behaviors, and even in military strategy. But the Hobbesian myth of a need for a singular, centralized power to keep everything from falling apart remains necessary as long as that central power continues to exist, and thanks to its control over education and media, even those who claim to oppose it will be indoctrinated in the values that constantly regenerate it.

As such, the self-proclaimed May 15th movement and the Real Democracy Now platform constitute a two-pronged neutralization, at the theoretical and tactical levels, of any popular revolution that truly seeks to confront the problems that everyone in Spain is facing.

On the theoretical level, the architects of the Spanish Revolution are substituting a stultifying dose of populism for the increasingly radical analyses that were being collectively developed across the country in the months from the September general strike to May Day. On the tactical level, they are enforcing an extreme pacifism, which makes their references to the Tahrir Square and Iceland victories, both based around violent uprisings, appear rather demagogic.

Where anticapitalist analyses and critiques of State power were gaining visibility throughout Spain, the members of Real Democracy Now talk mostly about replacing the politicians currently in power, modifying the electoral laws in a way that would favor smaller parties, and legislate practices of ethical banking. Politicians have already been replaced countless times–that's the charm of democracy–and many countries already have important third and fourth and fifth parties, and nothing has changed. The populist, "anti-ideological" character of many of the occupations has silenced many a debate, and in some cases even resulted in people with a more radical analysis being pressured to leave. In multiple cities, banners deemed inappropriate (for criticizing the police, opposing the State in its entirety, or calling for active election boycotts) were taken down by self-appointed organizers.

Far from revealing, let alone attacking, the roots of the problem, the Real Democracy Now movement congeals a widespread and critical resistance into a univocal posture of opposition devoid of content. In occupations where the Real Democracy Now platform has been the dominant ideological force, such as in Sevilla, the critical

A skeptical view of the occupations can help us see what is valuable in them, and what is self-defeating. To anyone who was already paying attention to resistance at the grassroots in Spain before May 15, it is undeniable that thousands of people were already taking action, often at the neighborhood level or in the workplace, in response to the economic and social war being waged against them. Nor is the approaching end of the occupation movement an end to this web of struggle. In Barcelona, many pre-existing neighborhood assemblies have started weekly meetings and protests in their local plazas, while several neighborhoods that did not previously have an assembly are now forming them. In other cities, struggles against mortgage evictions or ecologically devastating development projects are continuing with renewed vigor and visibility.

What was useful about the occupations was that they provided a space for people to meet, for oldtimers to hear new voices and for newcomers to find accomplices; they revealed a collective strength; and they created a rupture with the quotidian reality that has us convinced of the illusion of social peace transmitted daily by the media. Only in such a rupture can people begin to realize that the current system is neither inevitable nor accidental but a deliberate sham that we can and must dismantle. Only in such a gathering can people see that society is more than the cubicle, the checkout line, the metro, that we have the power to make something new. And in the occupations, our capacity for spontaneous self-organization was revealed. No matter how big the crowds grew, in every city people were able to meet all the logistical needs that arose, either informally or through the official structures of general assemblies and commissions.

But the occupations also displayed a number of obvious structural weaknesses. Ironically, while demanding "real democracy now," the protestors recreated a new democracy, just like the old democracy, much sooner than they had anticipated. Everywhere that the occupations grew to include more than a thousand people, the central assemblies that were used as a supreme organizational body became totally inoperative. Even the most experienced moderators to come out of the European antiglobalization movement had to admit that

in the assemblies, real debate and meaningful consensus was impossible. Nonetheless, they continued to try to address the situation with more and better moderation.

A symphony of critiques and complaints arose from Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia, Sevilla, and elsewhere: assemblies were being manipulated by leftwing politicians or Trotskyists; the real decision-making was done in the commissions and the assembly just rubber-stamped every proposal passed by it; the centralized nature of the assemblies forced most people to be spectators and made paricipation impossible, especially for those who couldn't spend five to six hours a night in a commission and then in the assembly; the central principles of the Real Democracy platform, such as nonviolence, were imposed, sometimes by force, and shielded from debate; minorities were silenced; people in certain committees were accused of corruption; the ability to make populist speeches and sway the masses outweighed real debate; people with critical views or ideas falling outside the dominant progressive-democratic ideology were excluded, silenced, or even ejected, while in some cities fascists were allowed to participate in the name of unity.

In Barcelona, a proposal to decentralize the general assembly demonstrated the absurdity of the chosen structure. The proposal would have converted the commissions into autonomous working groups, and the centralized assembly into an "encuentro" where people could share ideas, resources, and proposals, but without having to get the approval of a majority in order to put an initiative into practice. Where differing initiatives conflicted, the working groups involved would coordinate and figure things out on their own. In reality, the Barcelona occupation already worked partially in this way, and the official organizational structure was just a thin veneer of legitimacy imposed atop a fairly chaotic and impressively creative and versatile organizing network.

The proposal was explained several times to the general assembly, and voted on two consecutive nights. Both times, nearly everybody present (perhaps ten thousand people) voted in favor of the proposal. And both times, the proposal was defeated. The first time, the vote was revoked on a technicality, that may have been the fault of an exhausted moderator. The second time, about thirty people, out of

thousands, voted for "more debate." It had already been firmly established that debate was impossible in the mass assembly, so the proposal was sent back to the commission. But people in the commission had already reached an absolute consensus on the proposal after days of debate. In other words, the proposal to decentralize the assembly was impossible to realize because the assembly was inoperative, for the very reasons of over-massification that motivated the proposal in the first place.

In a short period of time, the experiment in direct democracy faced an upward limit. In the exhausting context of the cumbersome general assemblies, one could begin to appreciate delegation or representation (the bane of direct democracy) as a benign innovation designed simply to make the process workable. And as the majority of people realized they were just spectators, no different than in the existing democracies, and participation in the meetings began to dwindle, organizers might have come to appreciate democracy's coercive aspect: the social contract is nonvoluntary, and citizens can't simply walk away.

If we are not afraid to take the Spanish Revolution as a historical example, we find all the hypotheses of direct democracy contradicted and discredited. The exclusion, manipulation, and elitism that people have gotten sick of are not a result of term limits, campaign financing, lack of third parties, or corruption, any more than the economic crisis was a result of unethical decisions or lack of oversight (see : Joshua Clover's "Busted: Stories of the Financial Crisis"). Rather, these problems stem from the highest ideals of democracy itself, which have never been realized in any government that has yet existed, but are being put into practice in the plazas of Spain.

It is the paranoia rooted in the impulse towards centralization–the idea that one decision-making structure should be legitimized at the cost of all others, that social conflict should be avoided, that all decisions need to be approved by a higher power, that people cannot be trusted to organize themselves in decentralized networks–that demands a concentration of power and the concomitant exclusion, elitism, and repression. The scientific basis for the idea of centralization has already been undermined, in complexity theory, economics, computer science, the understanding of collective intelligence and