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Podemos and their Latin American Connection

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Introduction

Podemos, which in English translates as 'We Can', is a Spanish political party which was officially established two months before the European Parliament elections of the 25th of May 2014, when it caught everyone's attention given its unexpected results. Only a few months after its creation it became the fourth most voted Spanish party, obtaining 1.25 million votes¹ and 5 European Parliament seats. This unforeseen result took the media and the two main political parties in Spain, the conservative Partido Popular (PP) and the social democrat Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), by surprise. Given this novelty in Spanish politics, Podemos saw itself under constant scrutiny.

The party has suffered a continuous stream of attacks by the more conservative leaning media, which especially seemed to target the party's Latin American connection. This connection relates to the past of some of Podemos' most senior members and founders, some of whom worked as consultants in various Latin American countries. For example, Juan Carlos Monedero, one of the founders, but now ex-member of Podemos, was an advisor to the Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and his government. He has also been accused of fiscal fraud relating to irregularities with the payments and declaration of work carried out for various Latin American governments. These include claims by one of the largest daily newspapers in Spain, *El Mundo*, of his receiving up to 1.5 million Euros from Venezuela.²

This has had negative effects on the party's image because of its possible ideological, financial and professional ties with what some consider extreme left-wing regimes, such as those of Venezuela,³ Ecuador and Bolivia.⁴ These regimes are considered to be populist⁵ and to follow a post-neo-liberal agenda, where the state seeks to reverse the effects and policies of the Washington Consensus. The Washington Consensus was a term coined by the economist John Williamson in November 1989. It referred to a list of ten policy recommendations, made by international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which poor countries should follow in order to become more prosperous. To

¹ Cordero & Montero, 2015, p.358

² Recuerdo, 2015

³ Bassets, 2015, p.116

⁴ Kennedy, 2015

⁵ Pizzolo, 2007, pp.375-378

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

entice countries into carrying them out, these institutions made their loans conditional on the adoption of such reforms.⁶ Summarised by Temple University professor and leading expert on Bolivia, Benjamin Kohl, "The economic focus of these policies was on reducing government deficits, floating exchange rates, privatizing state-owned enterprises, and opening the country to international capital."⁷

Latin American countries were no exception, and during the 1990s radical macro-economic reforms, in line with the Washington Consensus, were adopted throughout the continent. It was expected that with the change of the productive structure to many Latin American countries, they would be able to successfully compete in international markets. This would create the conditions for economic growth based on exports and foreign direct investment. The reality was far from such expectations. One of the clearest failures of these reforms has been in the negative effects of the social development and distribution of income in Latin America. A good example is the increased level of poverty in the region's population. In 2003, the United Nations data showed that 225 million people in Latin America were poor, of which 100 million lived in conditions of extreme poverty. Poverty in Latin America in 1980 was at 40.5% and extreme poverty at 18.6%, while in 2003 poverty had increased to 43.9% and extreme poverty 18.6%.⁸

A more concrete example would be that of the case of Bolivia. The country had experienced neo-liberal restructuring since 1985 but one of the most apparent failures of the neo-liberal reforms was *El Plan de Todos* ('The Plan for All') in 1993. This plan included the privatization of 50% of the state industries which had provided 60% of all government revenues. The aim was to attract international investors, increasing economic growth to 11% and to create thousands of jobs. However, the outcome was that workers lost jobs in the privatized industries and there was hardly any economic growth. Furthermore, the government increased energy consumption taxes significantly, but they only managed to cover 60% of the state revenues which used to come from the now privatised oil and telecommunications companies. This led the government into increased deficit spending.⁹

⁶ Naim, 2000, pp.87-91

⁷ Kohl, 2006, pp.304-305

⁸ More-Bird, Perez Caldentey & Ruiz Napoles, pp.151-158

⁹ Kohl, 2006, pp.313-314

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

Resentment towards these market-orientated policies grew throughout Latin America and a post-neo-liberal trend began to set in in the region. It is mainly represented by the left-wing governments of Bolivia (with Evo Morales in office since the 22nd of January 2006), Ecuador (with Rafael Correa in office since the 15th of January 2007) and Venezuela (with Nicolás Maduro, in office since the 14th of April 2013, following the legacy of Hugo Chávez who was in office from the 2nd of February 1999 until his death on the 5th of March 2013). They all follow the basic model of twenty-first-century socialism as an alternative to free market capitalism. Amy Kennemore and Gregory Weeks from the University of North Carolina provide an excellent explanation of this concept and how it is being used by these governments. They state that Correa, Morales and Chávez gained their respective electorates' support through the use of a discourse that adopted anti-establishment, anti-elite and anti-foreign messages, whilst also calling for a greater role for the state to attend to the interests of the marginalised classes. Kennemore and Weeks also explain that the term 'twenty-first-century socialism' is attributed to a German scholar of Marxism, called Heinz Dietrich. Theoretically, this concept aims "to build on the mistakes of both neo-liberalism and twentieth-century socialism."¹⁰ It seeks to increase state regulation and power while also allocating resources more efficiently to give individuals, predominantly the poor, the opportunity to assert themselves politically and economically. To better serve the interests of the majority, over that of the elite, it plans on re-founding institutions to transform the historic imbalances (social, economic and political) present in society. Whereas foreign economic policy impositions are rejected, it wants to incorporate a more humanitarian capitalism where the state nationalises strategic natural resources to redistribute its revenue.¹¹

Presidents Evo Morales and Rafael Correa, from Bolivia and Ecuador respectively, gained power after a prolonged period of crisis by promising to change the status quo and to correct the inequalities of their countries using the power of the state. Applying the concept of twenty-first-century socialism, they established new constitutions through direct democratic practices and redistributed the nation's wealth into the hands of marginalised classes, as well as reversing the previous neo-liberal policies. They financed this by increasing their governments revenues via the nationalisation of the hydrocarbon and mining sectors.

¹⁰ Kennemore & Weeks, 2011, p.267

¹¹ *Ibid.* pp.267-268

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

Although foreign companies could continue to exploit the natural resources, the majority of the income was kept by the state.¹²

The biggest issue for Podemos and its Latin American connection, is their link to Venezuela. Many Spaniards, in particular conservative sympathisers, feel uneasiness towards the Latin American country because they consider it to be a radical dictatorship, in part because it has been presented in this way by the Spanish media. Podemos knows that any link to Venezuela will immensely damage the image the electorate have of it,¹³ thus preventing Podemos from appealing to the majority of Spaniards.

It is this paper's objective to investigate and assess the extent to which Podemos and its leaders see the leftist populist regimes in Latin America as an inspiring example. To find out what exactly Podemos likes and dislikes about these Latin American countries, their leaders and the policies that have made them so popular. Is Podemos bringing twenty-first-century socialism to Spain? Does it plan on implementing similar policies? Is it copying the discourses used by Correa, Morales, Chávez and Maduro? What is the connection between Latin America and Podemos?

Spain has been facing remarkable socio-economic changes since the beginning of the economic crisis of 2008, which caused, and continues to cause, devastating damage to the country. The crisis in Spain was particularly severe because of the collapse of its real estate market. Together with construction, they represented 43% of the country's G.D.P. Therefore, as soon as the housing prices dropped, unemployment rose sharply, which created an eviction epidemic as people failed to keep up with their mortgages. Home buyers and developers began to default on their payments to the loans that had been given out to them by Spanish banks. Consequently, dozens of smaller regional saving banks, known as *cajas*, as well as bigger banks, went bankrupt, and the banking system required a huge bailout.¹⁴

Harsh austerity measures were adopted by the PSOE government during Zapatero's second term in office in 2010. These included but were not limited to, increasing VAT from 16% to 18%, reducing expenditure on state infrastructure 6 billion euro until 2012, a 5% decrease in

¹² *Ibid.* p.268

¹³ Bassets, 2015, p.116

¹⁴ Paumgarten, 2013, p.39

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

wages for public employees in 2010 and raising the retirement age from 65 to 67.¹⁵ Austerity continued under the PP with Rajoy's government in 2011. Among other reforms, aimed at answering to European demands for austerity and restraint on spending, the PP government increased VAT again from 18% to 21%, reduced unemployment benefits and cuts were made to public spending on education with less money being spent on grants and research. In 2012 the unemployment rate had reached its highest peak in recent history, an alarmingly high 26.02% and had hit the Spanish youth the hardest, with 55.13% of people under 25 years old unemployed.¹⁶ With the Spanish economy in such a dismal situation and austerity measures putting a huge strain on the population, the revelation of numerous corruption scandals, including the illegal financing of the PP national government and of many regional governments, contributed to a pervasive dissatisfaction and a serious decline in confidence in political institutions.¹⁷

Tired of this situation, on the 15th of May 2011, a protest march was summoned by a group called Democracia Real Ya ('Real Democracy Now') through social networks. Thousands of citizens began filling the streets, occupying and setting up encampments in major urban squares of more than 50 Spanish cities, such as Madrid's Puerta del Sol and Barcelona's Plaça de Catalunya. They gathered to protest against the austerity cuts and high unemployment.¹⁸ This became known as Spain's 15-M movement, also known as the *indignados*. The 15-M turned into the expression of the widespread resentment for neo-liberal practices that had intensified income inequality and the anger at governmental corruption.¹⁹ Podemos managed to capitalise on this unrest. The leaders and founders of the party were involved in the demonstrations of the 15-M and learnt from what citizens were saying in the assemblies. Iñigo Errejón, at that time Podemos' Campaign Manager, feels that the 15-M created the opportunity to end the 'kidnapping' of Spanish politics by part of the elite (*la casta*) and that without the 15-M, Podemos' existence would not have been possible.²⁰ 15-M created the opportunity for Podemos, it prepared the terrain for it, since it was a large national movement which was highly critical of the bipartisan system and their austerity measures, which are

¹⁵ Éltető, 2011, pp.45-47

¹⁶ Mateos & Penadés, 2013, pp.162-167

¹⁷ Cordero & Montero, 2015, p.360

¹⁸ Charnock, Purcell & Ribera-Fumaz, 2012, p.4

¹⁹ Cameron, 2014, p.1

²⁰ Del Barrio, 2014

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

aspects that Podemos itself also criticises. In a way, the 15-M was the social expression of the political crisis in Spain and Podemos has become its political manifestation, offering itself as the catalyst to crystallize the political will of the movement.²¹ Even the social media team of Podemos during its campaign for the European Parliamentary elections of 2014 was formed by people that had done the same job for the 15-M protests.²²

Literature Review

Much about Podemos, their rise and strategy has already been covered extensively by the media, yet academically, not much has been said about this party. In particular, there is hardly any mention of their Latin American connection except for the extensive Spanish media coverage of the subject, done so mainly in a talk-show fashion rather than in a full in-depth investigation.

Despite the scarce literature on Podemos, a book called *#Podemos: Deconstruyendo a Pablo Iglesias* was published by the Catholic University of Deusto rather rapidly after the European Parliamentary Elections, in June 2014. It was written in an attempt to answer the top ten questions about Podemos, questions that many Spaniards had after the surprise results it obtained in the elections. The first chapter, written by Rodríguez Suanzes (a journalist and correspondent for *El Mundo* in Brussels), is primarily focussed on the history of the party and its Secretary General, Pablo Iglesias. He describes Podemos as being built around its leader, of great dialectical ability, incredibly sure of himself and with an enormous ego.²³ However, he provides no proof or any examples to back these claims. There is no mention of how the structure of the political party or the way it functions is centred specifically around Iglesias, which leads one to think that such claims are merely opinions, not facts. The professional past of some of its members is discussed and Iñigo Errejón is said to be the closest of Podemos to the government of Caracas. Again, there is no proof or explanation given to support this claim. There is mention of his doctorate thesis focusing on the first Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) government in Bolivia, in office since January 2006, and that he was researching at the Universidad Central of Venezuela before being recruited by Iglesias, but

²¹ Díez García, Errejón Galván, Grande, Ramos & Prieto Serrano, 2015, p.17

²² Errejón Galván, 2014, p.26

²³ Rodríguez Suanzes, 2014, pp.16-17

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

nothing else.²⁴ Rodríguez Suanzes continues the chapter by explaining the political marketing strategy of Podemos and how it used television and social media to get their message across. This leads him to discuss how Pablo Iglesias had presented two television programmes before becoming the Secretary General of Podemos, 'La Tuerka' and 'Fort Apache'. Both of which are left-leaning political talk shows. He describes Iglesias as being the first politician to have professionalised television talk shows, in reference to his constant appearance on them as a way to get his message into millions of households and into the heads of the millions of dissatisfied Spaniards.²⁵

Regarding any references to the party's Latin American connection, Rodríguez Suanzes states that Iglesias and his group have been very close to the new South American movements, though more so to Ecuador's President Rafael Correa rather than to Chávez's or (to his successor) Nicolás Maduro's Venezuela. They have given lectures and conferences in Venezuela as well as spending time close to Chávez and Maduro. To prove the closeness between Iglesias and Chávez, Rodríguez Suanzes provides us with some quotes from Iglesias which the latter decided to dedicate to Chávez on the day the Venezuelan leader died, on the 5th of March 2013, where he was moved when seeing videos of Chávez and how he, Iglesias missed him a great deal. Rodríguez Suanzes believes that Podemos has had to moderate its message in order to obtain more votes, and is wary of the clear sympathies it has towards Chávez.²⁶ Even though throughout his chapter Rodríguez Suanzes gives us a wealth of information about the history of Podemos and Iglesias. When he tries to relate the party to Latin American movements and leaders, Rodríguez Suanzes' claims fall short due to his work being included in a book directed at a broad public, and not a scientific publication, which makes his allegations less trustworthy. He continually states that Podemos is close to the Bolivarian revolution, to Chávez, Maduro and Correa yet he never says what it is that Podemos has learnt or likes about them.

The Bolivarian revolution refers to the political process promoted by Chávez, of left-wing socialist policies, from his first election in 1998. It is named after Simón Bolívar (1783-1830) the Venezuelan revolutionary leader who helped Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru and

²⁴ *Ibid.* p.19

²⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 20-27

²⁶ *Ibid.* pp.36-43

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

Colombia achieve their independence from Spain. The core principal of this revolution was the fight against foreign imperialism in the form of the spread of capitalism throughout Latin America due to the Washington Consensus, the forces of globalization and neo-liberal economic policies; holding the United States mainly to blame for the negative consequences of global capitalism. It attempted to implement popular democracy, economic independence, equitable distribution of revenues and an end to political corruption. The policies sought under this process included nationalisation and a substantial investment in social welfare programmes.²⁷

Out of the few academic articles that mention Podemos, Marc Bassets (a journalist and correspondent for *El País* in the U.S.) in and his article 'Spain's New Patriots', provides us with a nice overview of the evolution of the party so far. He refers to Podemos as being a left populist party and explains the strategy it is following, with a particular focus on how it aims to reclaim patriotism for progressive ends. He identifies the type of discourse it is using, a divide of 'us the people' versus the established elites (*la casta*), where the true patriots are the social majority because they do not steal and are not corrupt like the elites. The most interesting contribution of this study is the mention of two core influences on the party officials Iglesias, Errejón and Monedero. These are, the Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) and his concept of hegemony.²⁸ As explained by Douglas Litowitz, assistant professor to the Florida Coastal School of Law, hegemony describes "a condition in which the supremacy of a social group is achieved not only by physical force but also through consensual submission of the very people who were dominated."²⁹ This is achieved by making people unconsciously aware of and receptive to the hegemonic group's values and beliefs, until these are fully absorbed and totally accepted as the norm.³⁰ This concept is essential in explaining the way Podemos operates, since it has presented itself as a counter-hegemonic force that will contest the hegemony of the elite (*la casta*).

The other influence being the Argentinean philosopher Ernesto Laclau, who taught the young party officials of Podemos "to reverse the pejorative notion of 'populism' as a synonym for

²⁷ Wilson, 2008, pp.525-537

²⁸ Bassets, 2015, pp.112-113

²⁹ Litowitz, 2000, pp.518-519.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.519

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

demagogy, bigotry, and authoritarian rule."³¹ In this sense he argues that populism is a way of articulating diverse demands, a way of constructing the people as a collective actor and guaranteeing democracy. Furthermore, Bassets certifies Podemos as being on the left of the political spectrum even though Podemos rejects the categories of left and right and prefers to use those of below versus on top. While their agenda and structure remain an enigma for him, he identifies the fresh air they have brought to the stale Spanish political scene, striking fear in large sectors of the political and financial establishment. Despite this good overview of the party, in particular the intellectual roots of some of its leaders, his only comment about their Latin American connection is through the views of ex-president Felipe Gonzalez (PSOE), who talks about the past of some of the founders of Podemos and how they began their political careers belonging to Communist organisations, their close links to Venezuela and the accusations of the party being financed in part by its controversial government.³²

Vicente Navarro, a famous Spanish sociologist and political scientist, has also dedicated a few words to Podemos. In his brief article in *Green Left Weekly*, he identifies the type of discourse generated by the party, redefining class struggle as the elites (at the top) versus the rest (at the bottom). The support for Podemos, in his view, is "intricately linked to the policies pursued by the conservative People's Party (PP) government."³³

A more contextual account of Podemos comes from Anna Bosco, associate professor of comparative politics at the University of Trieste, and an editor of *South European Society and Politics*. In her article in *Juncture* from June 2015, she situates the party at the centre of Spain's democratic midlife crisis. This is in reference to Spanish democracy being only 40 years old and experiencing instability due to the rupture of Podemos into the political scene. She describes Podemos as being part of the radical left and a populist force. She believes the party's success comes from effectively channelling the discontent of the people, which is due to the economic recession and the corruption scandals, not to mention the government's policies, as Navarro has. She believes that these two factors have created distrust in political parties, disrupting the usual bipartisan system in favour of alternatives.³⁴

³¹ Bassets, 2015, p.114

³² *Ibid.* pp.114-116

³³ Navarro, 2015, p.14

³⁴ Bosco, 2015, pp.66-70

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

Further academic mentions of Podemos describe it as being a radical left and populist party. They also talk about the creation of its discourse, its novelty in Spanish politics and try to explain its surprising success. While the scarcity of material on the party is an issue, hardly any of the few articles that talk about it mention anything related to the party and Latin America. One of the very few articles referring to Latin America and Podemos, is from the work of Pedro Fernández Riquelme and his research on the symbols of the new left.³⁵ His paper provides us with very important information regarding the political strategy of Podemos and how it resembles the strategies that have been used and that have triumphed in Latin American countries such as Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. For example, he explains how Hugo Chávez's first campaign was not clearly socialist, it was ambiguous and more importantly, anti-everything (anti-poverty, anti-corruption, etc). Once in power he did base his mandate upon socialist principles for the social majority. This sounds extremely similar to the strategy adopted by Podemos, since they do not want to be recognised as a left-wing party, believing nobody identifies with those labels anymore and preferring to centre the debate on the privileged 1% versus the rest, the 99%. This raises the question, will Podemos also turn to socialism after obtaining power?

While trying to figure out whether Podemos is populist, Fernández Riquelme identifies another aspect in Podemos that resembles the Venezuelan regime. A characteristic of populism is the way the political party is identified with its leader and Pablo Iglesias has appeared on television on a near daily basis. The party's leadership could be easily reduced to his figure, and while there is no cult towards him yet and Podemos does not fully resemble Bolivarian aesthetics (considered to be life-sized images of the leader, in the form of graffiti or on posters), the strategy used by Podemos has similar characteristics which are worth being aware of. One of the other similarities that he identifies, as did Bassets, is the strategic use of patriotism in the creation of its discourse. How, even though they are a left-wing party, they have adopted this term to mean the majority of honest and hard-working Spaniards, those that are not part of *la casta*. A formula of positive inclusion copied from Chávez and Correa, a fact that Fernández Riquelme acknowledged but Bassets failed to mention. Despite Fernández Riquelme being one of the few to write about the link between Podemos and Latin America, his analysis is focussed on populism and political marketing. Without enquiring

³⁵ Fernández Riquelme, 2015, pp.19-32

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

further about this, the literature on Podemos is missing a key factor that defines the Spanish political party, a more detailed analysis of its Latin American connection.

It is this paper's intention to provide a thorough evaluation of the extent to which Podemos and its leaders see the populist regimes in Latin America as an inspiring example and add a highly necessary clearer idea as to what exactly is the Latin American connection to Podemos. It will use a diverse set of sources, ranging from writings, interviews and television programmes, some produced and presented by the leadership of Podemos. It will be structured chronologically, beginning before the political party was created, and continuing beyond that point. This will be in order to find out whether the party officials of Podemos have maintained similar ideas and opinions about the Latin American left-wing regimes of Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela. With this information, it will become clear up to what point Podemos is emulating the type of leadership or discourse originating from these countries, if any at all.

Chapter 1: Before Podemos

In 2007, Pablo Iglesias wrote a chapter in a book he helped coordinate, called *Bolivia en movimiento: Acción colectiva y poder político*. The book analysed the political project of MAS in Bolivia and the evolution of the social movements that helped it into power in 2005. The chapter focused on the role that subaltern classes in Bolivia have had in the global resistance to capitalism. The subaltern is a term used in critical theory to refer to those that are outside (socially, politically and geographically) of the hegemonic power structure. Already, in the first pages of his chapter one can identify some parallelisms between the events that occurred in Bolivia between 2000-2005 and the events that occurred in Spain between 2011-2014. Iglesias believes that the end of the neo-liberal period in Bolivia had two characteristics that stood out. These were the combination of conflicting collective action, such as the Cochabamba protests of 2000 and the Bolivian gas conflict of 2003, and the creation of an electoral reference, the 'Movimiento al Socialismo' (MAS). In the Spanish case, one could consider these to be the protests of the 15-M and the creation of Podemos. Of course, these events could not be foreseen, but it is interesting how in both countries large

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

protests preceded the rise in popularity of the political party capable of becoming the political reference of the protestors.³⁶

He also wrote about the necessity of measuring the actual and potential impact that social movements can have on the global political system, especially ones which could link governments of the periphery and semi-periphery with radical left movements of the core countries. The concepts of periphery, semi-periphery and core come from the world systems theory, developed by Immanuel Wallerstein, which refers to the inter-regional and transnational division of labour, dividing the world into those categories. Core countries focus on higher skill, capital intensive production while the peripheries focus on low skill, labour intensive production and extraction of raw materials. From these first pages of his chapter one can see the clear interests that Iglesias has: the global fight against capitalism in all its forms and the importance he places on the Bolivian experience. In particular, he states his interest in the creation of a discourse that links the new movements of the periphery with the subaltern population of the core countries. He believes that it is possible and desirable to "indianise" the radical European left through common languages as a strategic device for the global fight. With this word (a term coined by Iglesias) he refers to the key role that identity plays in mobilising the subaltern sectors and the need to create identity links between the indigenous left and movements of resistance to capitalism in the rest of the world.³⁷

Regarding Evo Morales, his opinion is that the political project that he leads, a nationalist, anti-imperialist and anti-neo-liberal one, is a threat to the economic interests of transnational companies, such as Exxon Mobil or Repsol YPF. He acknowledges the success Morales had in articulating a collective project formed of different Bolivian social movements, and the creation of an alliance with sectors of the middle class, key in helping him achieve a set of economic reforms for the country, such as the nationalisation of the natural gas industry.³⁸

Towards the end of the chapter, he explains why the Bolivian case is so important. Not simply because the political success of Evo Morales may influence and spread to other Latin American countries. Not merely because his government follows the counter hegemonic project led by the Venezuela of Chávez. The key, he states, is in the fact that Bolivia is proof

³⁶ Iglesias Turrión, 2007, p.260

³⁷ *Ibid.* pp.260-261

³⁸ *Ibid.* pp.266-267

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

that neo-liberal policies have created their own antidote, allowing the emergence of subaltern forces. Iglesias goes into great detail to explain this point. He argues that neo-liberal policies destroyed the proletariat-mining syndicates, provoking the emergence of the indigenous collective work force. This alteration of the collective workforce was also due to the migration processes from the country to the city and in the increase of the informal economy that was profoundly ethicised. The capitalist restructuring meant the weakening in power of class organisations and a redefinition of subaltern forces that acquired an ethnic aspect. The migration process of the indigenous forces into the city was met with racism and therefore direct confrontation that provoked the rise in indigenous nationalism and a new subaltern force. As well as this, he also talks about the neo-liberal policies of the United States (U.S.) trying to eradicate the production of the coca leaf, without providing a substitution plant for the indigenous population to work on, and how this was met with important resistance which elevated the figure of Evo Morales and created the need for the political instrument that was MAS.³⁹

The characteristics of the Bolivian social movements allow for an intense relationship with the radical left movements of Europe. The fact that they managed to reach institutional power, opens new avenues of collaboration that help create a global strategy of resistance. That is why Iglesias thinks it is fundamental for the radical European left to "indianise" itself, leaving behind Eurocentric prejudices. From this, one understands a bit better where his interests lie in regard to Bolivia. For him, lessons are to be learnt (and applied in Europe) from the leftist movements of this country, in particular the way the subaltern forces emerged, were mobilised and took institutional power thanks to the political project of Evo Morales.⁴⁰ Between the years 2000 with the Cochabamba water war, and 2005 with the gas wars, Bolivia had been immersed in a rebellious cycle of left-indigenous insurrection against the neo-liberal order and the privatisation of the country's natural resources.⁴¹ During that time, two presidents were toppled and elections were pushed forward to December 2005, where Evo Morales of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) became the country's first indigenous president, having gathered 54% of the popular vote.⁴² The main proposals of the

³⁹ *Ibid.* pp.267-278

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 279

⁴¹ Cabezas, 2007, pp.189-190

⁴² Webber, 2010, pp.51-52

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

electoral programme that helped Evo Morales win the elections, were based on an increased taxation on the hydrocarbons industry to bolster social spending and a call for a constituent assembly to establish a new constitution.⁴³

Iglesias continued to be fascinated by the events of Bolivia. He wrote an article about the same topic in the same year but this time with the help of Iñigo Errejón. Together, they insisted on the worldwide importance of the electoral victory obtained by Morales in 2005, arguing that it was "more than a mere change in the country's political elite." To them, it was "the institutional crystallization of a set of processes that converged with the start of a cycle of anti-neo-liberal fights that initiated in the year 2000"⁴⁴, in reference to the Cochabamba protests. They want to understand the context in which the counter hegemonic projects of Latin America emerged, especially in Bolivia, and the possible alliances they can make with other anti-neo-liberal movements, in particular with European ones. Their persistence with this idea becomes somewhat clearer when they introduce an argument that Boswell and Chase-Dunn made in their book from year 2000 *The Spiral of Capitalism and Socialism. Toward Global Democracy*. It makes reference to the idea that the European Union is the best candidate to lead, economically and politically, the transition in the shaping of the configuration of global power, so that the eventual success of the European social movements affects the world economy. For these authors, this would require the alliance of global movements and the revolutionary states of the semi-periphery to be actively linked to the challenge of internationalism, which is a political principle that advocates greater global cooperation and the transcendence of nationalism.⁴⁵ It is worth noting, while the chapter is mainly focused on Bolivia, Iglesias and Errejón recognise Venezuela as a model of leftist counter-hegemonic resistance.⁴⁶

Chávez's Venezuela is also praised by Juan Carlos Monedero in an article he published in 2008 called 'La victoria escondida del Presidente Chávez'. In it, he explains how the media have portrayed Chávez as a dictator but he feels that Chávez has demonstrated his full commitment to democratic procedures. His opinion is that Venezuela has one of the best constitutions of the world and is the vanguard of Latin American emancipation. He ends the

⁴³ *Ibid.* p.66

⁴⁴ Errejón Galván, Espasandín López & Iglesias Turrión, 2007, p.113

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* pp.143-144

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p.123

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

article with a statement of the highest admiration for Chávez, "No un Chávez sino mil Chávez será el mejor legado dejado por el Presidente para la nueva Venezuela".⁴⁷

In the same year, Iglesias and Errejón wrote another article published in *Tabula Rasa*, also "about the possibility of a communication interface between the movements in Latin America and Europe".⁴⁸ They believed that the crucial liberating factor at the time was to be found in the political emergence of ethno-racial hyper-proletariat subjects (the peasantry and the lumpenproletariat) in Latin America, articulated around different cultural identities from those of classic anti-systemic movements.⁴⁹ By lumpenproletariat, which is a Marxist term, they referred to the part of working class that is unlikely to ever achieve class consciousness and is thus useless to the revolutionary struggle.

Two years later, in 2010, Iglesias and Errejón worked together again on another article about Latin America. It looked at the main geopolitical factors to understand the possibilities of left-wing parties in the region. They described Latin America as being historically submitted to dependency structures. However, the counter hegemonic process that was occurring at the time aspired to overcome the historic and systematic relations of subordination and dependency regarding the interests of the core (the United States of America and Europe).⁵⁰ Therefore, in their opinion, in a process of systemic transition towards a global geopolitical landscape not dominated by the United States, the possibility of change had become available for the region, making Latin America a powerful laboratory for the experimentation of post-capitalist politics.⁵¹ In the last pages of this article they talk about Bolivia and Ecuador. To them, the international repercussion of indigenous people entering the political sphere in Bolivia cannot be underestimated. Regarding Ecuador, they consider it to be the third country (together with Venezuela and Bolivia) to follow the continental Bolivarian alternative. They praise its courageous foreign policy under Correa that has involved, among other things, becoming a member of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). Nevertheless, they criticise the fact that this has not been followed up with equally dedicated domestic policies. Due to the continuing corruption problems and the exportation of

⁴⁷ Monedero, 2008, p.15

⁴⁸ Errejón Galván, Espasandín López & Iglesias Turrión, 2008, p.285

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.289

⁵⁰ Errejón Galván & Iglesias Turrión, 2010, pp.1945-1947

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p.1950

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

agricultural products, a gradual distancing from the indigenous social movements has occurred. Despite notable advances in social policies, such as a more redistributive tax legislation, it leads them to view Rafael Correa's Ecuador with moderate optimism in regard to its anti-neo-liberal stance.⁵²

Pablo Iglesias and Juan Carlos Monedero have expressed their opinions in other media apart from written academic articles, for example, in the Spanish television programmes 'La Tuerka' and 'Fort Apache'. 'La Tuerka' is broadcast online via *Público TV*, is financed by Juan Carlos Monedero's work as an international consultant⁵³, and is presented by him and Iglesias. There are videos uploaded to its YouTube channel where they talk about Venezuela and Chávez. While there is less place for nuance in a short interview for a broad audience than in a scientific publication, one still gets to listen to their message and see their reactions to certain questions and topics.

Uploaded in 2011, 'La Tuerka' has a video of Juan Carlos Monedero on the television show 'Toda Venezuela' from the Venezuelan public television network *Venezolana de Televisión*, speaking to Hugo Chávez via a telephone call in a very close and friendly manner. During their conversation, Monedero expresses his happiness with the Bolivarian process of Venezuela, encouraging Chávez to continue his good work. He also explains how Europe is experiencing a crisis *of* the capitalist system, not a crisis *in* the capitalist system. That Europe is beginning pay detailed attention to Latin America and that Chávez is a reference, needed in the fight against capitalism.⁵⁴

The day after Chávez died, on the 6th of March 2013, 'La Tuerka' uploaded another video. This time a complete programme of a little more than an hour's duration, dedicated to Chávez's death, with interventions from Iglesias, Errejón and Monedero. In it, they express their sadness for his death and defend Chávez from the conservative media's harassment, that had called him dictator and mentioned that the world was better off with him dead.⁵⁵ The most important part of the programme happens when Iglesias states that Chávez won elections with a patriotic discourse, very similar to the one that Rafael Correa uses in Ecuador

⁵² *Ibid.* pp.1952-1953

⁵³ Más Vale Tarde, 2015, Monedero: "Gasto el dinero que yo gano en hacer 'La Tuerka'", 9:42-9:46

⁵⁴ La Tuerka, 2011, Juan Carlos Monedero charla con Hugo Chávez, 0:00-4:21

⁵⁵ La Tuerka, 2013, Hasta siempre comandante Chávez, 2:35-3:16

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

and that this is something that the southern European left should learn from. He reasons that the European left have very little chance of winning if they keep using the same traditional leftist discourse and symbols. They need to openly state that they have a national project against the 'troika' (meaning the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund) that has been imposing harsh austerity measures on Greece, Cyprus, Ireland, Portugal and Spain since 2010. To Iglesias, this is the most important lesson to learn from the Bolivarian process, the creation of a national, patriotic discourse that represents the people.⁵⁶

'Fort Apache' is a political talk show presented by Pablo Iglesias, broadcasted by the Iranian channel *HispanTV* in Spain and in various Latin American countries such as Ecuador, Chile, Colombia, Venezuela, Uruguay and Argentina. On the 11th of March 2013, the official YouTube channel of *HispanTV* uploaded a complete Fort Apache programme that was also dedicated to Chávez's death and the future of Venezuela. Iglesias introduces the programme talking about how Chávez has become one of the main drivers of change in Latin America. A charismatic leader that has synthesized the collective will of the people and has become a reference to his country.⁵⁷ Afterwards, Iglesias gives a minute to each participant in the show to give his opinion on what Chávez has meant to them and to the world. Juan Carlos Monedero, who again states his sadness for the death of Chávez, explains how to him, Chávez symbolised the possibility of doing the impossible, overcoming neo-liberalism. How he made it possible again to rethink socialism away from a Eurocentric point of view and create an irreversible process, the Bolivarian process.⁵⁸ Next, as they did in other programmes, they defend Chávez from the conservative media attacks that described him as being an authoritarian dictator.⁵⁹ During Monedero's intervention, he explains that Chávez was dismissed in this way because of the fear that, in times of a capitalist crisis like the current one, people would realise the viability of the Venezuelan alternative. He provides two examples to highlight his point with a comparison between Spain and Venezuela. Chávez and his government built 200,000 houses last year to give to his people yet in comparison, Spain is evicting 150 people every day. In Spain, many of his students cannot afford to pay their

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 30:45-32:26

⁵⁷ HispanTV, 2013, Fort Apache - Muere Chávez: ¿Y ahora qué?, 0:00-0:55

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 3:48-4:57

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 25:13-26:00

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

tuition fee meanwhile, Venezuela is the country with the second highest number of university students.⁶⁰

In March 2013, Pablo Iglesias was interviewed on 'Dando y Dando' a television programme from the Venezuelan public television network *Venezolana de Televisión*. During the interview, he states that what is happening in Venezuela and Latin America is a fundamental reference to the citizens of the south of Europe. Venezuela demonstrates that an alternative way of governing exists, one that favours the social majority, not the elites. It is crucial that what is happening in Venezuela and Latin America be explained in Spain, which is what his television programmes try to do. He explains that the arguments and explanations he puts forward in these programmes are different from those shown on the main Spanish media channels and this becomes an essential weapons for social discussion. Hegemony, he says, has to do with what is in people's heads and what is on the television always helps us think, that is why it is such an important space for politics.⁶¹

To further describe the alternative that Latin America represents, he points out that everyone can visualise the end of the world but no one can visualise the end of capitalism, a different society. That is why Latin America, even with all of the geopolitical difficulties it faces, demonstrates that it is an alternative and why it is so crucial that this message enters people's heads. In Spain people say that it is of no importance which party rules since there are no alternatives, no other options. Iglesias believes this is a lie because Latin America has proven to the world that it is possible to have a real democracy and political will, where countries recover their sovereignty and can reject foreign financial institution impositions, such as paying their foreign debt because they feel it is illegitimate, or can decide not to govern for a group of bankers that represent the minority of the population, and instead govern in favour of families and the social majority.⁶² To him, it is fundamental that Latin American ideas and experiences 'invade' Europe because, particularly in the south of Europe, there is a grave deficit of democracy. Democracy is being stolen from citizens and it is essential that the experiences from Latin America are not trivialised, but made well known and explained to

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 34:15-37:40

⁶¹ La Tuerka, 2013, Pablo Iglesias en Venezolana de Televisión - Entrevista completa, 3:14-6:18

⁶² *Ibid.* 6:58-8:17

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

these citizens.⁶³ He ends the interview by saying that he is envious of the Spanish people living in Venezuela, in a country being affected by so many changes and transformations that it could become a democratic example to the citizens of the south of Europe.⁶⁴

From the articles, television programmes and interviews analysed, one gains a better understanding of the opinions and interests that the party officials of Podemos had regarding the leftist Latin American governments before the creation of the party. Pablo Iglesias, Iñigo Errejón and Juan Carlos Monedero are clearly anti-capitalist and are extremely critical of neo-liberalism. Their interest in Bolivia seems to be related to the emergence of subaltern forces, which ironically arose due to the neo-liberal policies which these forces fought against (as argued by Iglesias)⁶⁵ and their rise to power, through the political project of MAS, led by Evo Morales. Already, one can see possible links between these Bolivian developments during the period 2000 to 2005, and events in Spain, from the beginning of the economic crisis of 2008 to the present time. The 15-M movement might be considered the Spanish subaltern forces, which emerged as a response to the austerity measures, and the socio-economic situation of Spain after it had been severely hit by the economic crisis of 2008. Podemos can be thought of as the political manifestation of the 15-M movement, offering itself as a political project, the one best crystallising the will of the protestors, similar to the way MAS did in Bolivia. The constant mention of establishing possible alliances between counter-hegemonic projects in Latin America with anti-neo-liberal movements in Europe could also be interpreted as a reason behind the creation of Podemos.

Throughout the primary sources analysed, one can also appreciate the strong admiration that the leaders of Podemos felt towards Chávez and Venezuela. They view Venezuela as a model of leftist counter-hegemonic resistance, they believe that Chávez is a reference in the fight against capitalism and constantly defend him from criticism. What was perhaps most significant though, were the comments made by Iglesias about the need of the European left to learn from the discourses of Chávez and Correa. His idea concerning the abandonment of traditional leftist symbols and discourse, and their substitution with a patriotic discourse that represents the people and a national project against the 'troika', are precisely elements that are

⁶³ *Ibid.* 26:48-27:08

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 28:35-28:54

⁶⁵ Iglesias Turrión, 2007, pp.267-278

characteristic of Podemos. It is also worth noting the way Monedero and Iglesias described Chávez. A person that symbolised the possibility of doing the impossible, who overcame neo-liberalism and created an alternative way of governing, for the social majority, an alternative society. This also sounds a lot like the discourse that was going to be used by Podemos. However, to confirm these resemblances, one must look at whether the opinions and views of Iglesias, Errejón and Monedero, have changed since the creation of their political party.

Chapter 2: After Podemos

Once Podemos was established in March 2014, the variety of primary sources available to analyse from the party officials was reduced, since their work and political strategy was based around them appearing more often on television than writing academic articles. Therefore, many of the statements that will be analysed will come from interviews and political debates of television programmes where they were asked about their ties to leftist Latin American regimes.

Ecuador's public media channel *El Ciudadano TV*, interviewed Iglesias and Errejón in September 2014. Interestingly, the interview starts with the presenter, Rubén Darío Buitrón, asking Iglesias what he hopes to learn from Ecuador. His answer is in line with what we have seen previously: that he has come to learn that politics can be done in another way. He uses the example of the dramatic situation for the citizens of the south of Europe, where austerity measures have created circumstances where one out of four citizens is poor and the unemployment levels are outrageous. Meanwhile Latin America, which has departed from historically terrible situations far worse than those of Spain, has achieved laudable results. In particular, he highlights Ecuador's success since Correa took charge in January 2007. Although he acknowledges that Podemos sympathises ideologically with Correa, Iglesias explains that not only himself but the international institutions as well, recognise Ecuador's economic achievements. These achievements were accomplished, according to him, by using the country's sovereignty to dictate over important economic decisions and operate in an alternative political manner, opposing the neo-liberal orthodoxy. This is Europe's problem as well, neo-liberal practice is presented as the only option and course of action to take. This is one of the reasons behind the choice of Podemos as the name for their political party, it is the

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

party which defends that an alternative approach to politics is possible and exists, as proven by the experiences of leftist Latin American regimes. It is from these experiences that Podemos wants to learn, to defend Spanish national sovereignty and the dignity of its citizens, not only in economic matters, but in the fullest sense of the word.⁶⁶

The interview continues with Iglesias expressing his admiration towards the government of Rafael Correa, where it has achieved something very important to him, the prominence and participation of the majority of people in politics. Democracy is not only a process of voting every once in a while. When people are given a chance to be more actively involved in politics and have more of a say in matters that concern them, like in Ecuador, good things happen. A better constitution is written, better laws are made to discipline the financial powers that have led us to disaster, other laws are made to improve the economic situation and the living conditions of the majority of Ecuadorians, inequality is reduced and investments are made in research and development. Due to this, Ecuador is an example to any democrat that wants to learn and bring certain aspects of Ecuadorian politics back to Spain, while considering the differences between the two countries, in order to make live better for Spanish citizens.⁶⁷

Even if scarce, interviews by other types of media still occurred. For example, Iñigo Errejón was interviewed in November 2014 by the yearly journal *IC - Revista Científica de Información y Comunicación* of the University of Sevilla. In the article, he was asked about the theoretical and political roots of Podemos, to which he answered that part of them come from the analysis of the experiences of political change in Latin America as a way to understand and investigate how politics works. It intends to challenge the notion that the production of knowledge occurs in the north and is applied in the south. Its interest also lies in the construction of new political identities and the processes of construction of new hegemonies in the region. Further mentions of Latin America in the article have been when Errejón was asked about its position with respect to a law regulating the media. In his answer, he mentions that information is a fundamental right for all citizens that must be guaranteed against any type of monopoly. As an example, he talks about the law passed in Ecuador in

⁶⁶ El Ciudadano TV, 2014, El Ciudadano: Entrevista a Pablo Iglesias, líder del Movimiento Podemos de España 28/09/14, 1:21-3:33

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 3:36-4:52

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

2011 that impedes a person from having shares in companies and in the media at the same time. The media in Spain, he continues, cannot be in the hands of large financial groups.⁶⁸

The famous Spanish documentary television programme 'Salvados', broadcast on the private channel, *La Sexta*, also dedicated a one-hour show to interviewing Pablo Iglesias while he was in Ecuador as part of a tour around Latin America. In the opening scenes, Iglesias is sitting next to Rafael Correa, chatting. He tells the Ecuadorian President that Podemos will be asking him for political guidance. Correa mentions how Iglesias is well known and admired in Ecuador, and also states his hope that Podemos will do well. They both agree on the crisis of values in Spanish society: the population is more concerned by the views of the rest of Europe and the IMF regarding the possibility that Spain will not pay its debts on time. They go on to mention how more importance is attached to this, rather than the fact that there are Spanish people being evicted and losing their homes. Tragically, this appalling situation occasionally leads to acts of suicide. At the end of this scene, Iglesias comments on the enormous parallels between Ecuador and Spain, adding that, with this in mind, he will make contact from time to time, to ask for advice and encouragement.⁶⁹

After Correa leaves, Iglesias is interviewed by the programme's presenter Jordi Évole. One of his questions has to do with the augmented budget in defence that Rafael Correa issued. Évole asked Iglesias what he thought of this and if he would do the same in Spain. He answered that he guesses Ecuador would feel it was necessary to defend the country's sovereignty. If it was necessary in Spain, in order to assure the independence of the country to ensure the social and civil rights of its citizens, he would do the same, but he did not feel that this was currently the case for Spain. He also states that his opinion on the army has changed. It is necessary, but the problem is that a lot of the time it defend interests that are contrary to those they should be defending, those of the people.⁷⁰

In the following section, Évole asks what Iglesias is doing in Ecuador, to which he responds that he and his team have come to do a tour around Latin America, visiting Bolivia, Ecuador and Uruguay. The presenter then enquires about Venezuela and if Podemos is annoyed by the constant association that the press makes between them. Iglesias agrees that it damages them

⁶⁸ Errejón Galván, 2014, pp.22-45

⁶⁹ Salvados, 2014, Pablo Iglesias en Ecuador, 0:46-2:07

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 4:53-5:40

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

because of the image of Venezuela created by the Spanish media: making it look as if the Maduro government is a dictatorship, when this is a lie, in his opinion. While he disagrees with many of the actions taken by the country's government (nevertheless, not saying precisely which ones), he thinks it is scandalous that it is presented as a dictatorship. He also defends himself from this association with Venezuela because in politics, he explains, it is important not to let others set your agenda. When Spain has six million unemployed people and other politicians say that his party has to explain their ties to Venezuela, in his opinion, it is not the time to do so.⁷¹

Évole continues the interview by asking him what can Europe learn from Latin American countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador or Uruguay. Iglesias explains that these countries are very different, they have departed from a very different economic situation. They are peripheral countries that started out in situations of extreme poverty that are not comparable, not even with the dramatic situation that Spain faced at that moment. However, in his opinion, their governments have demonstrated an admirable approach to politics. He clarifies that his party is called Podemos because it was always said that their political ideas, such as a tax reform to make the rich pay more, was not attainable. Meanwhile, in these Latin American countries similar opinions were shared but in the end their governments succeeded and implemented different but modest economic policies (again, not specifying which ones) that have led to better salaries, a better quality of life, or situations where Ecuador has invested in research and development, even having Spanish doctors working there that could not find employment in Spain. What Podemos appreciates and values, is this alternative and challenging approach to politics, which demonstrates a strong political will can achieve the desired change against all odds. The interviewer asks him for his favourite policy that Rafael Correa has implemented, and Iglesias answers that for him it would be the small and symbolic gesture that was the prohibition of commissions that banks charged in ATMs. It shows a political style that Iglesias likes, one where the president does not let himself be intimidated by the rich and stands up to financial powers that take advantage of his country's citizens.⁷²

They then talk about the renegotiation of Ecuador's foreign debt that Correa ordered in July 2007 when he established a commission to investigate the legitimacy of the debts incurred by

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 8:24-10:15

⁷² *Ibid.* 10:48-12:15

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

the country between 1976 and 2006. The commission concluded in 2008 that a series of bonds issued in 2000 were unlawful and recommended that Ecuador refuse to make payments on them. Correa denounced the bonds as illegitimate, consequently, Ecuador repurchased them at a more competitive price in April 2009.⁷³ Iglesias comments enthusiastically on how he greatly admired the efficacy of this measure, which permitted the country to allocate more resources to helping the unemployed, and to opening schools and hospitals. When asked if he would do the same in Spain, that is, declare part of the Spanish foreign debt as illegitimate and default on it, he says he would have an audit to find out if any fraudulent deals had been made by the previous governments.⁷⁴

The presenter continues asking him about his opinion on these Latin American countries, to which he decides to comment on the things that he dislikes about them, which is their problem with corruption that has not been eliminated.⁷⁵ Afterwards, they begin talking about capitalism and the close and friendly relationship that Iglesias has with Correa. Iglesias explains that, as Rafael Correa says, there are two types of societies, those that coexist with capitalist markets and those considered societies of the capitalist market. He defends the former, where capitalist markets have to respect and assume that democracy is above them and adapt to democracy.⁷⁶

Later on in the interview, they talk about a proposal in the electoral programme of Podemos, where it is suggested that no individual should own more than 15% of any economic sector. In the interview they use the media as an example of an economic sector that would be affected by this proposal. One is reminded of its similarity with Ecuador's media law which was previously discussed by Errejón in his interview with *IC - Revista Científica de Información y Comunicación*. When asked if he would have a television show similar to Chávez's 'Aló Presidente', (which was a talk show hosted by Chávez every Sunday to promote the Bolivarian Revolution), should he become president of Spain, he replies in the negative. Nevertheless, as a result of his experience as a Member of the European Parliament, Iglesias sometimes doubts the current usefulness of parliamentary debates. He believes his own interventions are more valuable and beneficial if broadcast to the masses. He comments

⁷³ Gentile, 2011, pp.151-152

⁷⁴ Salvados, 2014, Pablo Iglesias en Ecuador, 12:16-13:37

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 14:14-14:58

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 20:47-21:14

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

on what he sees as the current problem of the real parliaments perhaps being television talk shows. Due to this belief, he would like to bring the parliament and political debates closer to the people - making sure that politicians have to face their voters directly, thus ensuring their accountability and consideration for their words and interventions.⁷⁷

As the discussion draws to a close, Iglesias and Évole sit and talk with an Ecuadorian economic analyst, critic of Correa, Roberto Villacreses. The presenter tells him that Pablo Iglesias would not mind implementing some of Correas' economic policies, such as increasing the taxes on the wealthy, and asks if this has led to less investment in the country. Villacreses answers that Ecuador is one of the least attractive countries to investors, both nationally and internationally, because Correa's policies have not created business-friendly conditions. Iglesias then asks, if this is the case, why is Correa so popular with voters? It is because a great number of people are living from the social benefits that Correa is providing, which Évole associates with the idea of a basic living subsidy that Podemos proposes in its electoral programme. Both the presenter and the analyst agree that this could be interpreted as a way of buying votes. Nevertheless, the standard of living in Ecuador has increased, notwithstanding the fact that the analyst comments that this has been achieved not thanks to Correa, but in spite of him.⁷⁸

Interestingly, perhaps the most damaging event of the Latin American connection with Podemos, was the Monedero scandal. On the 23rd of January 2015, Juan Carlos Monedero was accused by *El Mundo* of receiving 425,150 euro from the Venezuelan government in 2013 and not justifying it correctly to the Treasury. Monedero reasoned that the payments he received were from consultancy work he had undertaken in 2010 for the governments of Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Ecuador relating to the creation of a single Latin American currency.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the problem with his justification to the Treasury had to do with him creating a business in 2013, days before the payment, (and, of course, before the existence of Podemos), called 'Caja de Resistencia Motiva 2' to deposit the money and pay less tax, 3 years after the work had been carried out. He was considered to have committed

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 31:32-35:10

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 41:41-45:05

⁷⁹ Recuerdo & Sánchez, 2015

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

fiscal fraud.⁸⁰ The scandal grew when *El Mundo* published on the 26th of January 2015 that he had received even more money from Latin American governments through a Spanish foundation. The newspaper stated that Monedero had received two transfers with origin from Venezuela, worth nearly 1 million euro through 'Fundación del Centro de Estudios Políticos y Sociales'. This, added to the previous amounts he received, totalled nearly 1.5 million euro.⁸¹ The worry was that Podemos might have been financed by the Venezuelan government. However, the scandal came to an end when the judge closed the case for fiscal fraud in August 2015 after Monedero corrected his situation of debt with the Treasury by paying 200,000 euro corresponding to the income tax of 2013 for the earnings relating to the 425,150 euro. Monedero asserted that a crime of fiscal fraud had never been committed, but by being denounced, headlines were seen in the media with the purpose of a smear campaign against Podemos.⁸² He appeared on *La Sexta* on the live television broadcast of 'Más Vale Tarde' to provide explanations for the payments. On the show he explained that he had used the money to finance 'La Tuerka'⁸³ but he also reproached the fact, from his point of view, in the history of Spanish democracy, no other political party had received so many attacks as Podemos, being accused of all kinds of unacceptable activity.⁸⁴

Since the creation of Podemos, mentions and admirations towards Venezuela and their government have been less frequent, virtually non-existent. In comparison, before Podemos, Iglesias and Monedero had no problem in making these type of comments in television programmes. When asked on 'Salvados' to explain his political party's ties with Venezuela, Iglesias avoided the question by saying the priority was to talk about the millions of Spanish unemployed.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, he did not mind talking about Rafael Correa's policies and wanting to implement similar ones in Spain.⁸⁶ Juan Carlos Monedero's resignation from Podemos in May 2015⁸⁷ could also be interpreted as political strategy by Podemos to further avoid any connections with Latin America by distancing itself from its most controversial member. Furthermore, on Podemos' electoral programme for the Spanish general elections of

⁸⁰ Becerra & Cuesta, 2015

⁸¹ Recuerdo, 2015

⁸² Manetto, 2015

⁸³ Más Vale Tarde, 2015, Monedero: "Gasto el dinero que yo gano en hacer 'La Tuerka'", 9:42-9:46

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 1:19-1:38

⁸⁵ Salvados, 2014, Pablo Iglesias en Ecuador, 8:24-10:15

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 41:41-45:05

⁸⁷ Carvajal, 2015

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

December 2015, there is also no mention to any of the leftist Latin American governments, their policies or leaders.⁸⁸ This avoidance by the senior members of Podemos of anything that could relate the party to Latin America is unexpected when one considers the positive statements they made, relating to leftist Latin American governments, in articles and television programmes prior to the establishment of Podemos. However, a possible reason for this could have been a political strategy. Aware of the importance of the Spanish general elections, the image the electorate had of the party could have been tarnished by mentions of ties with Venezuela.⁸⁹ The party officials of Podemos have always stated their anger at how the Venezuelan government has been portrayed in the Spanish media as being a dictatorship. Considering this, the avoidance of mentioning their ties or admiration towards leftist Latin American governments could be understood.

Conclusion

Having looked at what the leaders and founders of Podemos have said about leftist Latin American regimes before and after the creation of their political party, one can see that there is a clear Latin American connection. However, the literature about Podemos failed to identify what this connection was. It had limited its analysis to understanding the phenomenon of Podemos after its results in the European Parliament elections of 2014 and analysing its discourse. A detailed analysis of Podemos and their Latin American connection was missing.

This thesis has shown how the senior members and founders of Podemos have expressed admiration towards the governments of Rafael Correa, Evo Morales, Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro, considering them inspiring examples. Nonetheless, there are obvious parallels between Podemos and the experiences of leftist Latin American governments, not only in the statements some of the senior members of the party made. For example, the protests of the Bolivian indigenous forces and how Evo Morales' MAS and rose to power shares similarities with the 15-M movement protests and the popularity of Podemos in the European Parliament elections of 2014. Moreover, Iglesias has introduced in the discourse used by Podemos elements of the discourses utilised by Rafael Correa and Chávez.

⁸⁸ Podemos, 2015

⁸⁹ Bassets, 2015, p.116

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

Additionally, it is worth noting the resemblance between Rafael Correa's media law in Ecuador and the proposal of Podemos for a media law in Spain.

The leaders of Podemos had been interested in the social movements, transformation processes and the style of politics in Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela since before the creation of the party in early 2014. Monedero had worked as a consultant for these countries and Errejón had worked in Venezuela as a researcher. Pablo Iglesias wrote articles about these countries, and Errejón even wrote his doctoral thesis about the MAS government in Bolivia. They were interested in the counter-hegemonic projects, the anti neo-liberal stance and the emergence of subaltern forces in these countries, hoping to find a way to link them with left-wing movements in Europe. They admired Chávez and thought of Venezuela as the reference of leftist counter-hegemonic resistance. They thought that the European left needed to renovate itself and had a lot to learn from these countries, especially from the discourses used by their leaders. This can be seen by how the discourse used by Podemos reflects exactly what Iglesias thought the discourse of the European left should copy from the discourse used by Correa and Chávez. This was a criticism of foreign international financial institutions impositions (in this case the 'troika') and an abandonment of traditional leftist symbols.

While Monedero and Iglesias have shown appreciation for Chávez in the past, once Podemos was created, mentions of Venezuela or its president were less frequent, virtually abandoned. Instead, more mentions and similarities were made with Ecuador since it is considered less controversial with the Spanish electorate. This can be explained as a political strategy to avoid being hurt electorally due to the image of dictatorship created in the Spanish media regarding Venezuela.

Podemos has learnt and will continue to learn from the Latin American experiences of Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela. It is a leftist party with ideological, professional and personal ties with these countries. Pablo Iglesias, Iñigo Errejón and Juan Carlos Monedero, have used their knowledge and experience of the region to create a political strategy and discourse based around leftist Latin American ideas. Podemos could be characterised as a political party willing to fight against neo-liberal policies to create alternative counter hegemonic options for the benefit of the social majority. Not afraid of the wealthy, the elite or

Podemos and their Latin American Connection

international financial institutions, the sovereignty of a country and the well-being of its citizens are according to themselves their maximum priority.

This thesis makes clear that the Latin American connection to Podemos is the shared ideology and style of politics with leftist Latin American regimes, which pursue an alternative society where capitalism is not dominant in every aspect of politics, where alternative policies can be implemented that do not follow the neo-liberal orthodoxy and allow the social majority to benefit socio-economically rather than the hegemonic elite.

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