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Spanish State

Andalusia: "We need to continue reproducing an alternative common sense"

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For Teresa Rodriguez, the last few weeks [interview originally published 20 July 2018] have been ones of intense activity: presentation of the project "Adelante Andalucía" in different provinces, primary elections within Podemos Andalusia which finally confirmed her as the leader of this formation and the closure of the period of activity of the Andalusian Parliament. Paco Aguaza interviewed Teresa for the publication *El Salto*.

You were re-elected with three-quarters of the votes in the Andalusia primary and in the absence of support from the federal apparatus. What were the key elements in this? What do you think your candidacy offered to activists?

I believe this is the second round of the II Assembly of Ciudadana Andaluza. During this meeting we had thought about the need for the next step in the construction of Podemos. It went through this slow transition that we have talked about so many times before.

We were in the fast lane. The intention was to obtain rapid victories in intense electoral periods, taking advantage of the wear and tear of the political forces of the regime, of an open crisis of the regime, of a sensation of disenchantment on the part of the social majority, of indignation, of the will for change. Once we crossed and concluded this electoral cycle, this slow transition had to be rooted in the territory with the forces of change. This not in a few months or three years, because it is during decades that alternatives have been built in each of the "comarcas" (counties) of Andalusia.

It is in this sense that the demand for autonomy was made during the II assembly of Ciudadana Andaluza and now we have a strategic project in play, which is convergence, and which was put on the table in this process of primary elections. It is for this reason that we believe that that it is not only agreement on opposing them in Parliament which counts but also, a very clear alternative to the PSOE and what it is, and that we must avoid the institutional illusion of thinking that it is only by being part of the government, even in association with the PSOE, that we would be able to change things. We have had a very clear attitude in relation to the PP and the PSOE in Andalusia, denouncing them as the forces of the regime.

On the other hand, there is the will to build a process with its own identity, which is an extension of decades, not to say centuries, of the struggle of Andalusia wanting to close the gap with respect to the rest of the country and the continent. This will only be resolved with a process of awareness and self-confidence, with a specific programme to end this situation of inequality.

The convergence with Izquierda Unida goes back a long way. In Andalusia, it provides a notable electoral base, especially in the rural areas. However, the alliances with Primavera Andaluza or Izquierda Andalucista are more recent and we are talking about parties with some social implantation, but which does not necessarily translate into votes. So what do these *Andalucista* formations bring to the ensemble of Adelante Andalucía?

They bring about something very important which is to have preserved the healthiest tradition of *Andalucismo* These were the most critical sectors at the time when the Partido Andalucista decided to govern with the PP and the PSOE, and others if necessary, taking the Andalusian flag but abandoning the flag of the left and social transformation. Within this political force, these same sectors led a clear opposition to the rightward moving tendency of the PA and while crossing this desert kept this green and white flag which continues to have meaning to this day. They bring us

something fundamental for such a young force: to connect with the historical expectations of the Andalusian people and, in addition, they have been able to do so in a very generous way. Basically, they are comrades who have put at our disposal this heritage which they have been able to preserve during all those years when they were in the minority. They have brought it to our common project, without absolutely asking anything in exchange beyond collaborating in a process of change in our land. For me it has a lot of value.

In the parliamentary group, we were beginning to get closer to this reality, thanks to José Luis Serrano. He was a deputy for Granada and died after a year in the Andalusian parliament. He also came from this *Andalucista* tradition, which preserved the flag of the historic demonstration of December 4th and which also brought us this inheritance.

Thanks also to our connection with people from the Sindicato Andaluz de Trabajadores like Mari, from Coronil, who brought us this rural and Andalusian feminist background that is very valuable because, in our region, *Andalucismo* is very much linked to the struggle for the land and the struggle of the Sindicato de Obreros del Campo and the Sindicato Andaluz de Trabajadores.

And I also had a personal interest, and I experienced it in a very close way, because my father was from the Socialist Party of Andalusia. Far beyond that, very quickly, the need appeared to have a specifically Andalusian discourse. Because we believe that if we are able to govern in Andalusia, if we do not question the infrastructures that go far beyond what an autonomous government can decide, linked to the unfavourable and peripheral position of Andalusia in the market at the state and European levels, concerning also the ownership of the land, as a basis for other types of weakness and vulnerability in our economy.

If we are not able to touch those structures that are at the heart of the distribution of power in our land, we will not be able to change the reality of Andalusia. We can manage resources in a healthier way, we are more transparent, we manage better, clean up the administration and save resources to reinvest in public services. No. There is an underlying structure that needs to be touched that goes beyond what an autonomous government can do. And only a people aware of that reality and with a clear determination can change it.

How do these aspirations materialize in a political project?

There is an agrarian reform that has been needed for centuries on our land. This is a strategic bet for renewable energies where we could be innovators and exporters. To obtain sufficient resources to carry out this energy transition that could make Andalusia a leader in an economy with an endogenous development that has been pending in our land for centuries. With a tax reform that is able to collect enough resources to carry this through and which really works.

This is also evident from the commitment to experiences that are already taking place in Andalusia of localised production and consumption, of ecological agriculture. Experiences where people are demanding local organic production. Not only on the agricultural side but also in other types of goods and services that the administration has. A commitment to the local economy, to credit unions, by systems that can somehow begin to go in the direction of weaving the authoritative network that Andalusia needs and has not had, that other territories have had, to start thinking about the possibility of closing the gap.

Would forming the government in Andalusia be enough to do that?

No.

What else would you need?

There would have to be a lever to activate other mechanisms that have to be produced within civil society, which encourages certain economic and social behavior, which facilitate, empower, export and share knowledge throughout our land of experiences that are already taking place, energy cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, production cooperatives, social currencies. A whole administration making itself available to experiences of change and good practices that are already taking place in our land would be taking steps forward.

But it's not enough. We would also need an administration and a state that would put life at the centre and bet on an economy that generates employment in a dignified way and not only on autonomy.

I think that as with women, the policies that benefit Andalusians benefit the social majority because historically we have been in this position of vulnerability and therefore, change not only has to be produced in Andalusia, it has to happen also in Spain and in Europe.

The commitment to social policies is a commitment to the development of Andalusia because every time there are policies that precarise and cut public services it hurts us especially. This is particularly detrimental to women and to people with disabilities, to the collective, to the people who are in a situation of greatest vulnerability.

We have talked about what the axes of political action would be for Adelante Andalucía if it comes to power. But what would be the priority measure?

There are many priority measures. I believe that the first thing we would have to do when we come to power, not the priority but the first, is to audit the administration. The Andalusian public administration is a machine with enormous power that is wasted by the construction of a mechanism that does not distinguish between party, government and administration. Therefore, the first thing would be to audit the apparatus with which we try to change reality in Andalusia.

Secondly, it is likely to be reduced certainly or reinforced in places where it has been too light. To make an immense effort to undo the networks and structures of clientelist and para-administrative power that offer no guarantees whatsoever.

The government has to practice politics. Often a government is seen as a bureaucratic or technocratic apparatus. And it's not true. The government has to practice politics, it has to conceive of necessary transformations of an unjust reality. That's what a government has to do. The Andalusian government is not an administrative apparatus as many times we have tried to show. But the administration has to be professionalized and in this case we find a very bureaucratic and technocratic government, with a very politicized administration. We have to turn that tortilla over.

The essence of Podemos is citizen participation. How would the transfer of powers of decision-making and management to citizens be articulated by the administration?

There are many ways. Basically, for me the perfect mix would be between what Pablo Soto has done in the city of Madrid and what (Nacho) Murgui has done in the neighborhoods, well before when he was president of the Federation of Neighbours' Associations of Madrid. I think it is a mixture of digital participation, applying new technologies to political participation, but also face-to-face meetings, deliberative functions, to build commissions of participation around public services.

I come from the field of education and before, at first, when democracy entered in the educational field, the school boards had much more weight in the organization of life in the centers than they have now. The school boards have been weakened to empower the director, who is like the bureaucrat or political commissar trimming the public administration. This happens in health, social services and the entire Andalusian public administration.

It is necessary to restore the councils of participation in health centers, where also there is advice to consumers and professionals to articulate and to direct life in those centers, there has to be something more than the site where services are dispensed, spaces of socialization and citizen empowerment. And then for relevant punctual decisions, a very powerful digital participation can also be articulated.

We have looked at how the autonomous government would act politically if Adelante Andalucía wins an electoral victory. However, the polls do not point to this outcome, but rather one in which the PSOE-A wins the elections without gaining an absolute majority. At this point, do we contemplate the possibility of allowing for an alliance between the Partido Popular and Ciudadanos to oust a party that has governed Andalusia for almost four decades? Or on the contrary, would support for a Socialist government be possible to prevent the PP and Cs from forming a government?

We have defined this very precisely and accurately so that there is no possible uncertainty. We will never by action or by omission, if it is in our hands, make possible a government of the right. Neither of the PP, nor of Ciudadanos, because it would be the definitive exercise of political frustration: as we are not able to change Andalusia by the way of the confidence in the supposed left of the Socialist Party, we opt for the right as a vote of punishment. That is one of the most repeated positions in this country and we do not want it to be reproduced in Andalusia.

We see that there is a historical resistance to the right that has to do with the memory of the peoples of Andalusia of which we are proud, even if the effect has been to generate a kind of politically disfigured bureaucratic monster like the current Andalusian government. But, on the positive side, we are the only autonomous community that has resisted the right throughout its democratic history and we will not put an end to that tradition of remaining an impassable barrier to the right.

That said, we are not going to enter into a government with the Socialist Party because we are not able to obtain a majority. In some places like Cadiz they have been the ones who have had to vote our investiture. In this case, they would have to negotiate with us every budget, every law. We could work every amendment of each decree. It would be an intense parliamentary work which I think would also be interesting. Always connecting with civil society, with those who have been making concrete demands or a long time.

What should the relationship be between Andalusia and the Spanish state and its peripheries? And how should this apply to the case of a political party like Podemos?

Well, we have a transformation project that goes beyond Andalusia, among other things because our framework of struggle even goes beyond the Spanish state itself. We understand that it is necessary to combat the policies of the European Union which is also going to form the last barricade of change. Even if we take steps towards a democratically determined change we will always find ourselves with the stumbling block of the European Union. I recall a statement from (Jean-Claude) Juncker in which he told the Greeks that they had no right to democratically decide to leave the Treaties of the European Union, which is an absolute contradiction, but in fact it is like that. Our space of struggle is in the Spanish state and is also at the level of the European Union.

I believe that from Andalusia there is a fundamental historical contribution both for the democratic configuration of this country and for the recognition of the historical nationalities, where Andalusia played an important role in

conquering rights through mobilization and referendum.

The demands that are good for the Andalusian people are good for the social majority of the rest of the country, with certain similarities with the feminist movement. The demands of the feminist movement are not only for women because their starting point puts life at the center and benefits the social majority. In the case of Andalusia with respect to the whole of the state the situation would be similar.

There is also another question and it is the need to rethink the Spanish state from a more cooperative and less centralistic point of view where there is no development of one by the way of underdevelopment of another. Right now in Spain, the community of Madrid is a territory of similar dimensions to the province of Cadiz, and has a gross domestic product superior to that of Andalusia, even with tropical agriculture, the port of Algeciras, eight and a half million consumers, Malaga and its tourism... it makes no sense! Something is happening for profits to concentrate artificially in certain centers of power. It is necessary to undo this injustice because it does not benefit the social majority of Madrid but only those who concentrate fortunes.

Could this message of decentralization also be sent to the Federal Directorate of Podemos?

I think so, that we have to aspire, even in Andalusia, to share more power. Right now I have won the primaries with a candidacy called "Teresa Rodríguez" and we have made use of this personal factor from the beginning of the creation of Podemos, while assuming a self-criticism for it from the first moment.

I remember perfectly the first press conference at the Teatro del Barrio in Madrid. Pablo Iglesias said in response to a question from a journalist, I think they were from *Diagonal*, about whether it seemed too personalised a project and he replied yes. And it is because we come from a crisis of collective identity in our country, of a sense of defeat of the collective projects, of trade unionism as a space of socialization, of the party as a place where collective aspirations were expressed, of neighbourhood associationism as a place to unite wills and demands. We decided in a transitional manner which became institutionalized and we somehow lost out. It was therefore necessary to build new collective identities. At first it was necessary to rely on a certain individual legitimacy, but we must move towards plural leaderships.

In Andalusia, we would also have to divide power between the 62 regions that form Andalusia and not only in a centralized apparatus in Seville. And here, I start with self-criticism, also for the whole organization at the state level.

So you're not going to dissolve Podemos Andalucía?

No (laughter). I don't think we need to dissolve anything. What you have to generate are new spaces where you keep waiting for the overflow. It seems to me that Podemos was not born as a device that would reproduce itself for 150 years. We do not want to form a PSOE that lasts 200 years and keeps in positions, if possible, the same family for decades. What we wanted was to articulate politically social demands and indignation: a translation into a transformative policy and an effective power strategy which is capable of making us win for once.

That was Podemos and that must remain. Therefore, now in Andalusia the strategic project of Podemos is Adelante Andalucía as a space where people can be added who do not identify with Podemos because it is a consolidated identity, but maybe want to be part of a wider space where Podemos, Izquierda Unida, Primavera Andaluza and other groups that we want to attract are found.

The feminist movement has come to the fore. Keeping a due sense of proportion, 8-M played a similar role

to that of 15-M in the sense that it was able to bring people together and become transversal. In the big subsequent mobilizations, such as around pensions, it has been perceived that not only pensioners have participated. Do you think this dynamic of bringing together social demands and mutual support can be maintained?

When I was in social movements I always had political commitment, but in a limited sense. I formed part of a certain tendency to always travel from the social to the political to try to establish a winning strategy.

So I thought that when we formed a political party that was able to change reality and had sufficient courage, a sufficient relationship of forces and a sufficiently audacious program the three things necessary to change reality this was because social movements have come into contact with each other and have seen that they have a common problem which is basically the system and the need to transform it so they are able to design an alternative to put on the table and then win and get the support of a social majority. That's what I had in my head. In any case, that a television commentator on the sixth channel was going to found a party around himself and that this was going to shake a whole regime, was going to make a monarch fall, make the Partido Popular organise internal primaries, that a smooth talker like Pedro Sanchez would appear to say that he came anew to transform things or that Albert Rivera and Ciudadanos would appear as the regeneration of an already almost rotten right, was not dreamt of.

This cycle of change has occurred following the emergence of Podemos or, more positively, municipal governments of change, 20% of the population in this country is already governed by candidacies of change in the most important cities, in terms of population. It was not what I had in my head that all this was going to be generated following a television commentator who suddenly founded a party. But it has happened like this, the ways of change are complex.

I would like there to be a process of social mobilization, because Podemos has not only been the work of very intelligent people in the way that word is used. This Podemos and these people managed to connect with a common sense that was already being forged from below. That common sense and legitimacy helped it to seize the platform of the mortgage victims. In this country there was already a social majority that justified the halting of evictions with the bodies of neighbors faced with the police and the banks. In this country there was a very broad agreement with a movement like the 15-M that said "we do not want to be commodities in the hands of politicians and bankers", which is a demand of much radicalism and depth. There was already an alternative common sense around the *mareas* with which we could connect and we need to continue reproducing that alternative common sense.

If common sense becomes the war of flags and interclass irrational patriotic pride that does not see social inequalities but interterritorial hatred, the hatred of that which is different, which is from outside, which wants to self-determine or which seeks life, then we will be moving towards a society which has completely shifted to the right. No one has told us that in this country we are exempt from being able to take that risk, when alternatives and exits are being articulated in our environment to indignation and collective frustration.

We need to continue to reproduce this alternative common sense and, therefore, mobilization is what makes that happen. At this time, one of the biggest obstacles to the far right in this country is the feminist movement; and it emerged without anyone in command, as a highly inter-transversal movement where there are small groups and consolidated associations, where there are territorial coordinators and tweeters. And all of that is articulated with a structure of networks for social mobilization. The pensioner *marea*, exactly the same; the movement in defense of health in Andalusia, the same. I think you have to bet on continuing to build those network spaces where you are flexible in the way of obtaining results so as to get a majority participation.

What do you have to give up in your life as an activist when you come to lead a party with governmental

aspirations?

Fundamentally, there is a problem of time. The day has 24 hours and before I dedicated 24 hours to social activism and now I dedicate 24 hours to the political struggle.

I miss a lot of social activism on a personal level. It seems to me that there are many absurdities in the institutions, which is not the case in the social movements. Everything had a little more meaning.

I think it is important that even when we have positions of public or institutional representation we do not lose sight of what we do here, why we have come here. And let us never remove the ears, the hands and the feet from the outside, of the people who are still mobilizing at the door of Parliament, where we were also ourselves before.

One of the things I've learned in here is that what happens outside that door has much more weight than I thought when I was outside. The first thing a public representative does when they have to vote on the laws that are passed in here is to look at the newspaper to see where the social pressures are, what the social lobby says. That is why it is so important that this lobby exists: to influence legislators and governments and continue to build an alternative common sense and spaces of emancipation and participation.

Now it's my turn to be in here. Soon I will be back outside and I will continue to build that and, in addition, I want us to build an organization that is increasingly wasting less time on absurd things that happen in institutions. Apparently, it's a very rigorous job that we do in here but then, seen with perspective, it makes little sense. I also want to invest much more effort in looking out and connecting with reality, social and of mobilization. Sometimes, even in the aftermath of institutional rigor, we are able to pose the idea that we need to demobilize and that is very dangerous. Because instead of changing institutions, the institution will have changed us and us and we are not exempt from that happening.

But being inside an institution like the Parliament of Andalusia, do you self-censor, are you forced you to bite your tongue more or given more freedom to say what you want?

I think there is a certain sense of greater power mainly because of the people who listen to you, the audience you get. But I think I say the same thing now here as what I was saying outside. Sometimes, even with more anger against the adversary because of having them close, seeing how they operate, seeing how cynicism works in the institutions and the privileges, the perks, the relations with the structure of power that generate inequality and social suffering.

We haven't lost that. That rage is still alive and now it seems to me that we are able to hear more people than before. But it is not enough that we are able to send radical messages and speeches from the institutions. It is not enough because changes are not made with speeches, they are made with a correlation of forces.

Anything else to say to anyone who reads this interview?

Well, I hope a new cycle of mobilizations is approaching that overflows Podemos and dissolves us. I have no intention of dissolving Podemos, but hopefully there is a situation of overflow that passes over us, dissolves and includes us.

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