

# The role of the ex-left in Spain's *los indignados* protests

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The ending of the occupation of Madrid's main Puerta del Sol square by the *los indignados* (the angry ones), after more than three weeks, provides an occasion to address once again the "autonomy/no politics" perspective advanced by its leadership.

The occupations in all of Spain's main cities and towns were sparked by the increasing hardship and poverty faced by workers and youth. They opposed the austerity measures imposed by the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) government of Jose Zapatero.

The original May 15 protest, after which the movement is often named as M-15, and from which the "tent city" at Puerta del Sol emerged, was called by several Internet-based campaigns, including Real Democracy Now. While the occupations reflected a growing anger in the wider population with both the PSOE and the opposition conservative Popular Party (PP), they never threatened the government's rule.

The major groups involved insisted that the protests were based on the "principle" of having "no leadership". It was claimed that instead of the movement being "co-opted" by political parties, numerous collectives would meet in self-run assemblies to decide the future course of the protests in a "horizontal" structure.

Various pseudo-left formations have both championed and hid behind the "no politics" smokescreen in order to prevent the emergence of a genuine political challenge to the PSOE's social counter-revolution and to maintain the stranglehold of the trade union bureaucracy over the working class.

A critical role is being played by *Izquierda Anticapitalista* (Anti-capitalist Left—IA), the Spanish representatives of the political trend known as Pabloism. This tendency broke from Trotskyism in the 1950s on the basis of claims that the Stalinist and social democratic bureaucracies and various bourgeois nationalist movements were the vehicle for the socialist transformation of society. Decades later, many Pabloites occupy leading positions in parties that seek to unite various remnants of the old Stalinist and Maoist parties, in alliance with the apparatus of the trade union bureaucracy.

Just prior to the end of the Puerta del Sol camp, Esther Vivas, a leader of IA in Catalonia and a member of the editorial board of the Pabloite publication *Viento Sur*, wrote, "The movement

of citizens that has occupied Puerta del Sol and other plazas in diverse cities of Spain since the 15th of May has brought back political debate to the streets and put the role of political parties into question."

This is a lie. Alongside groups such as *En Lucha* (In Struggle)—the Spanish affiliate of the British Socialist Workers Party—the Pabloites were instrumental in ensuring that the movement never challenged the political parties and trade unions that have brought working people and youth to such a desperate predicament.

On May 21, Miguel Romero, the editor of *Viento Sur*, gave a revealing interview to the Pabloites' major publication, *International Viewpoint*, which outlines their critical role in heading off an independent movement of the working class.

In September 29 of last year, 10 million workers, nearly 70 percent of the Spanish workforce, supported a 24-hour general strike. Afterwards, fearful this massive opposition to the PSOE would escalate beyond their control, the trade unions refused to organise any further action. Instead, in February, the unions agreed to a "grand social pact" with the Jose Zapatero government and the employers' association. The pact included increasing the pension age from 65 to 67 by 2013. It followed public sector pay and welfare spending cuts, as well as reactionary "reforms" of labour protection laws.

Romero notes the hostility towards the trade unions this generated, particularly among young people. He writes, "However, it led to anger among the youth who had supported the [September] strike, solidarised with the pickets and so on. The idea spread that there was nothing to expect from the majority union. As to the minority unions, like the [anarcho-syndicalist] CGT, they have little weight."

"In early 2011, you could sense a certain tension in the universities," he notes, before adding, "*But at the level of the anti-capitalist left, we were fairly pessimistic*" (our emphasis).

The pessimism of the "anti-capitalist left" was entirely due to the undermining of the position of the trade union bureaucracy, in which many of them make a comfortable living and on which they rely in order to police and suppress the class struggle.

Their response was to play a central role in the formulation and promulgation of the pro-capitalist agenda that came to

dominate the movement of *los indignados*. They did this by cultivating relations with the leadership of the Puerta del Sol camp.

Romero states, “The coordination involves around 60 people. They were aged from 25 to 28. These are graduates with good professional qualifications, unemployed, precarious, suffering poor work conditions, without political experience or affiliation. There were no students among them. In the rallies, there were very few youths from the popular neighbourhoods.”

While the wider movement encompassed broader sections of the Madrid population, including many student youth, Romero’s description of the leadership of the movement is accurate. It was not a working class movement, but one based on sections of the middle class being hit by the enveloping crisis. The Pabloites determined to work assiduously within this group to channel the broader movement away from a confrontation with the government and its allies in the unions.

Romero explains, “As for the manifesto [of the M-15 movement] it was quite good”. Describing it as a “programme of democratic and social reforms,” he adds, “Ecology is there, though in a marginal way. *There is no huge anti-capitalist consciousness. The slogan ‘a-a-a-anticapitalista’ is often taken up in the demonstrations, but without great ideological content*” (our emphasis).

Romero nevertheless not only praises the manifesto, but acknowledges that *Izquierda Anticapitalista* in fact helped to formulate it and even had a presence in the leading bodies of the supposedly “non-political” groups that were its nominal authors.

“We have been present at the rallies since the beginning. Before, we were already present in ‘Jovenes sin future’ [Youth without a future]. We have then participated in the drawing up of the Manifesto”, he states.

The web site of *Jovenes sin future* lists supporters from amongst the Stalinist-led United Left (IU) and other formations, including the leading Pabloite, Jaime Pastor. In 1969, Pastor, in exile in Paris, joined the French *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (Revolutionary Communist League—LCR), headed by Alain Krivine. In 1971, he helped found the Spanish LCR and played a leading role for decades within the movement. When the Spanish LCR joined the United Left in 1995, Pastor served on its Federal Political Council.

The formation of *Izquierda Anticapitalista* in 2008 was part of an international attempt by the Pabloites to organisationally distance themselves from their politically disastrous alliance with the Stalinists. It was followed in 2009 by the transformation of the French LCR into the *Nouveau Parti Anti-Capitaliste* (New Anti-Capitalist Party—NPA), based on an appeal for a regroupment of various petty bourgeois tendencies.

The manifesto of the *los indignados* movement is tailored to the political aims of the Pabloites, not even mentioning the PSOE by name. Capitalism and the failure of the profit system are never referred to, with the manifesto merely stating, “The

current status of *our government* and economic system does not take care of these [democratic and social] rights, and in many ways is an obstacle to human progress” (our emphasis).

It talks of “inalienable truths”, while criticising an economic system and “a political class that does not listen to us”. It concludes with a call for “an ethical revolution”.

Romero continues, “We have very good relations with the non-sectarian autonomous current, which is very present in the movement. In a general way, it is necessary to be very prudent and reserved, notably in relation to self-affirmation: flags, stickers and so on.”

Their “very good relations” with the “non-sectarian autonomous current” was based on deliberately concealing their identity and real political agenda. The ultimate targets of this political fraud, however, were the broad mass of Spanish workers and youth. It was they who were hoodwinked into believing that the “autonomy” espoused by the M-15 movement represented a dramatic new form of “democratic self-organisation,” rather than a cover for the activities of the rotten and corrupt organisations of the political establishment.

With the support of the French Pabloites, IA helped establish and champion the various Internet-based campaigns that were then given widespread coverage in the Spanish media. Any elements within this movement that may have genuinely sought to oppose the PSOE and PP were prevented from doing so by the prohibition placed upon any discussion of political perspective and programme.

Elsewhere in his interview, Romero states, “For our current (young, non-sectarian, non-doctrinaire, closely linked to the social movements) it is an opportunity.”

In the political lexicon of the Pabloites, “non-sectarian” and “non-doctrinaire” are an avowal of their opposition to the development of a socialist and revolutionary movement against capitalism, and readiness to defend the establishment parties and the labour bureaucracy to this end.



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