

15M and degrowth: three years countercurrent

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15M and downshifting: three years countercurrent

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The birth of the 15M movement awakened consciousness, certainly. Many people doped by the system in which they got stuck, dulled by consumer society, by the "welfare state", responded with rage when the so-called "crisis" hit the pocket, the *modus vivendi*, the convenience of non-intervention, the *partitocracy*, the extreme alienation. And, of course, 15M was also a clear expression of the end of the "transfrancoism" (the transition from dictatorship) process and its social, political and territorial effect.

We shall not now discuss the strange emergence or development of 15M in the past three years, other, more authorized voices have accurately or wrongly done this, as a simple search on Internet search engines can attest. Yet, what we want to see is whether the 15M movement is a "revolutionary" one, as has been enthusiastically propagated, or a simple reformist attack aiming for the new era's neocapitalism which has already begun to show results like, for example, the emergence of various political parties in the European Parliament on May 25th, ie Podemos (we can) and other groups that emerged in the shadow of 15M, with programs that are almost photocopied from the *indignados* literature.

Getting outraged and getting involved is fine as long as we have wisdom and knowledge and not only the simple, yet logical impulse driven by the social and human consequences of, for example, the cuts imposed by the Capital and the State. Going from criticizing everything from the couch or bar to doing it on the square, learning what an assembly meeting really is, ultimately thinking of the overwhelming present and the uncertain future beyond our own navel are facts that can not be underestimated. Although, of course, doing all this just to end up with claims to the State and Capital from their same viewpoint does not seem best suited to reach a different, possible world.

In fact, what is exactly this so-called welfare state?: A conquest by popular classes or just another face of the domination system which provides the population with some necessary social services? The latter seems more accurate, which would explain why we keep relentlessly asking the State to provide services and rights, but we seem unable to accept responsibility for our lives and how we can achieve freedom out of our own initiative.

Today, three years after that awakening, which in many places focused on setting up

assemblies meant to be sovereign decision making forums and initiatives to shape new institutions and new values ??of popular character, demonstrations have become sterile and continuous —vindicating, yes, but down to mere daily resistance— and have abandoned any prospect other than immediacy, which is the bases of the systemic ideology of the consumer society itself, one of the "enemies" to be put down. 15M could not, or rather, did not want to break up with the system's institutions, much less build new ones, which leads to a kind of impasse that only leads to perpetuating the system. Obviously, all of this is neither revolutionary nor transforming and suggests that, after all, that was just the point.

The downshift proposal

There is a key aspect in relation to 15M: protest arose, as we said at the beginning, at the point when the middle classes suddenly discovered they had no money to pay for the brutal consumption they were anesthetized with. The majority of people were living with the belief —and unconsciousness— that the absurdity of infinite growth in a world of limited resources was possible. The real problem in our society, then, is forced De-growth, now identified as negative growth, which is managed in an authoritarian way, although passed through the false pretense of misunderstood austerity.

Decreasing wages and pensions, denial of social rights, growing unemployment, endless working hours... are widely and peacefully accepted through the mechanisms of social psychology and effective neuroscience discoveries. In fact, we are all part of the Market and to govern is to raise fear, to create political frustration by making believe there are no possible alternatives, and discourage people, especially through mass media, so they will lose their resilience bit by bit. Just see how restrictive measures have increased as socioeconomic rights and freedoms have decreased, together with the control and repression characteristic of paranoid governments.

It is in this context that the arguments of the 15M's reformers start to break down, because there are only two alternatives, as summarized by philosopher Ramon Alcoberro (<http://www.alcoberro.info/planes/decreixement06.htm>): either we tend to a voluntary and convivial degrowth, socially agreed and explained, or we buy the "negative growth" concept, managed by increasingly repressive governments and the thought police installed on television, in newspapers and on the Internet. «Governments lie when they say current capitalism can grow or that we can implement a "sustainable economic growth" without reducing freedoms, wages collapse environment destruction. Therefore, they have become increasingly authoritarian and manipulative. Fortunately, people are always more creative, and in times of crisis tools arise to overcome it. Or so we thought. Philosophy, understood as wisdom rather than as a vital tool for discourse analysis, will play an important role if we are to

overcome the crisis caused by our civilization's overconsumption», Alcoberro rightly writes.

What kind of "welfare", then, is one that causes emotional distress and poverty? The terrible and unexpected consequences of global overconsumption (global warming, genetic engineering, etc.) dramatically increased since Fukushima's nuclear disaster, reveal the true danger of accommodating the demands of States and Capital. «A society thought out from growth, but unable to provide growth refuses itself —hence much of the political and social unrest that occurred in progressive political thinking since the beginning of the century», Ramon Alcoberro points out.

Degrowth, which aims to break the deceptive language of productivism-addicts —through which growth ceases to be symmetrical— «will not be possible without the necessary limitation of our consumption and production, halting nature and labour exploitation by Capital», says Serge Latouche, one of the theoreticians of this concept. Obviously, it does not mean that we should "return" to a life of deprivation and work, but on the contrary by giving up false material comfort creativity should be unleashed, renewal of coexistence and ability to lead a decent life, all aspects of which 15M does not know or answer.

A local, autonomous, self-managed, independent, cooperative utopia... gives us the chance to start changing society from below, the only democratic strategy that can lead to a new possible world. In contrast, neither Statist's methods, proposing to change society from above under the power of the State, nor "civil society" approaches such as 15M and others, point to changing the system at all, on the contrary, they are determined to perpetuate it. But there are alternatives: complex and in need of profound changes in our consciousness, truly liberating for a scenario of ecological democracy.