

Perspectives from the Barcelona Assembly Movement

Texts against democracy, consensus, and reformism.

experience, our words and our actions. Reality is inverted, and it is forgotten that revolution is not only a question of form. It is the nature of this change we must insist upon. To create a world without money, without the exchange of commodities, without the buying and selling of labor, without companies as competing poles of value accumulation, without work being separated from the rest of our activities, without the State, without a political sphere that is specialized and isolated from our social relations.

“Why We Don't Lay Claim to Democracy”

Possibly the first anarchist text to come out of the occupation, this was published alongside “And after Sunday, what then?”

We participate in the struggles against home repossession, against evictions, against the cutbacks and all the abuses we suffer daily. We create social centers, libraries, newspapers with counter-information and analysis, community gardens, and specific events. We practice direct action, attacking the symbols of our oppressors such as the police, the politicians, and the banks. For all these reasons, we do not lay claim to democracy.

We believe that it is only necessary to lay claim to freedom, without establishing limits to our desires. Frequently it is thought that “freedom” and “democracy” are synonyms, but democracy always leads to an even stronger social control—it is dictatorship with other weapons, it is the State that tricks us into participating in our own domination. There is no single democracy in the entire world where the people are free, and this is not a question of corruption but rather of the normal functioning of democracies.

Like all kinds of states, democracy is based on centralization and the monopolization of decision-making. It doesn't matter if we all participate in these decisions, because massive assemblies are easy to manipulate. The person with the microphone, the people who want to lead, will always be within the majority and the minority will always be silenced. In Plaça Catalunya we are creating a real democracy and this is our great mistake. We are reproducing the same roles that exist in parliament; we are creating the progressive politicians of tomorrow.

We imagine a Plaça Catalunya with a diversity of assemblies, where everyone can start initiatives without passing through a centralized and cumbersome assembly, thus giving everyone the experience of participating in a process of autogestión instead of being spectators.

We can organize millions of initiatives with greater fluidity without having to pass through the commissions, which are easily dominated by specialists. We don't need others to tell us what we can do.

We are not satisfied with the single voice of the centralized assembly, because it's hardly any better than the daily silence of capitalism. We want a plaza full of voices, of assemblies, of conversations. We're truly interested in creating links between all of us, but we'd like to do it in another way: through solidarity between the struggles and not through the homogenization of our ideas.

Let's destroy democracy and spread freedom!

“And After Sunday, What Then?”

In Tahrir Square, after bringing down the dictatorship, people realized that it was only the beginning. Even though none of it appeared in the media, afterwards there was a whole series of strikes and occupations in factories and other places. Bringing down the dictatorship was just one step forward for opening the struggle and keeping the State from shooting them all down.

In Plaça Catalunya, if we bring down the monopoly of the political parties and the electoral farce, what will we have accomplished? Nothing more than to open new possibilities to struggle and achieve what we really want: the autogestión of our lives and the end of exploitation and social hierarchies.

We want to collectivize the social wealth, as our grandparents did in the revolution of 1936, and in the insurrections of Figols, Casas Viejas, Asturias, and the Hospitalet Commune in the years before. The dictatorship destroyed these struggles, but not our desire for freedom. Later, the democracy has maintained and intensified the social and economic changes made by the dictatorship.

We don't want just a plaza, we want the whole city.

“Assemblies, Democracy, and Capitalism”

This text appeared on a poster produced about a week into the occupation.

The democratic form is the most perfected political system that Capital has encountered for its development and universal implantation. There is no practical criticism of democracy without a criticism of capitalism. To accept or attempt to reform capitalism implies accepting or trying to reform its most appropriate political form. Democracy separates political decisions from the rest of social life. It foments the illusion that we are equals before the law and the institutions, while obscuring the fact that while it offers these possibilities they will only be a reality for those who can employ them. This separation avoids class antagonism or gender differences, reducing conflicts to an apparently neutral sphere in which it will be possible to achieve equality via discussion and consensus among the affected parties. And it is this mechanism that brings with it a generalized demobilization, in which any movement that is oppositional in the beginning can be integrated through dialogue between representatives.

Nonetheless, the criticism of democracy cannot be reduced to the manner in which decisions are made. Democracy, whether direct or representative, is the supremacy of means over ends, and the dissolution of potentialities into that which is purely formal. If a movement advances and confronts Power, it is not democratic. But if the conflict or the movement can be compatible with arbitration and conciliation, then it is normal that form and procedure should be the most important considerations. Organizing an assembly according to the proper norms becomes more important than what the assembly decides. Those who privilege procedures of administration are condemned to creating an administrative apparatus, instead of resituating discussion within the content of our

“The Greatest Violence Would Be Returning to Normality”

This flyer appeared about a week into the occupation.

In Plaça Catalunya we are already thousands. We have taken the center of the city. We have made it ours, and with our determination we have opened a fault line of indignation in the wall of consent and social resignation.

Now we only have two options: allow this crack to close up, losing a unique opportunity for a veritable social change, or open it as much as we can, widening it until it reaches the very foundations of our misery and exploitation.

If we want to get somewhere, if we want everything that we denounce and disdain to disappear, we must exceed the limits of the plaza. We must exceed the limits of the very legality which yesterday told us we could not occupy it, and today tells us we cannot leave it, that we cannot touch the normality that surrounds it.

We must disobey the voice of Power when it tells us that blocking a street is violent while it blocks human lives with layoffs and exploitation, when it tells us that confronting the police is violent while they torture immigrants and dissidents in their jails, when it tells us that attacking a bank is violent while it leaves whole families on the street for not paying the mortgage.

We must disobey, because no revolution has ever been carried out while respecting the laws of the powerful. We must disobey, because the greatest violence would not be to continue to act illegally, but rather to pass up the opportunity to end once and for all the abuses and all the massive violence this society produces.

We must take the streets, we must extend the revolt to all the neighborhoods and every field of life.

If we end this circus of politicians, we will have the opportunity to realize our dream of self-organization and collectivization. Without a doubt, this implies a hard struggle with much determination, responsibility, and perseverance if we really want to solve the problems we suffer. They will call us violent, they will repress us, they will try to assign us leaders and new politicians.

Therefore it is indispensable:

- never to pact with the rich and powerful
- to support the prisoners created by the repression
- to respect diverse paths of struggle
- to seize the streets, and the responsibility to sustain ourselves through mutual aid

It is not easy, but it is possible. The path is long and as long as our dream of liberty remains alive, we will be more alive than ever.

“Grave Errors of the Protagonists of the Central Assembly”

This flyer appeared on the first Friday of the occupation.

“Patience, patience – this isn't easy.” [Words often spoken by the meeting moderators] The forms and structures taken by the central assembly are not something natural, but rather a specific choice towards centralized instead of decentralized structures. Even though many of the organizers are surely reproducing what they already know in good faith, the effect and the purpose of centralization is to create a structure in which the majority cannot participate, they can only watch and vote.

“We are creating a space for expressing ourselves.” Lies. With a central assembly, they are silencing 9,999 spaces for expressing ourselves, replacing them with one single space. Didn't they notice that in the hours before the Central Assembly there was a multitude

of meetings, conversations, assemblies, and initiatives not controlled by anyone?

“Everyone agree? Good, consensus.” It is evident that in the majority of votes in the General Assembly, it is the abstaining vote that wins. Only four days of real democracy and we've already reproduced everyday democracy and massive apathy. They are killing the revolution with boredom.

“There's no time to debate here, this has to pass through the commissions.” But when there are thousands of people in the plaza, when in the meetings only the people closest to the speaker can hear, when some commissions last until five in the morning, there is no possibility to debate in the commissions either. A structure has been created in which delegation is necessary. The democracy with which we are all fed up has been reproduced.

How to Manipulate an Assembly

For he who has the microphone and announces the proposal, it is extremely easy to generate the desired consensus.

--Always propose the desired option in the first position. E.g. “The proposal is to do a silent march to Plaça Sant Jaume. Everyone in favor?” No one wants to be in the minority, so those who aren't in favor will abstain from voting, so there will be the appearance of consensus.

--Avoid debate on your ideological foundations. E.g. “The proposal is to carry out a nonviolent action against the banks.” Nonviolence is never debated, but imposed, by making exclusively pacifist proposals so that the options will always be doing nothing, or doing something nonviolent. You can't be a future politician if you don't know how to control the rage of your flock. This is what democracy is all about.

--When you monopolize the microphone to make speeches and sway the masses, it's best if you don't use the exact same gestures as Lenin did, so as not to reveal your true intentions.

--Never, under any circumstances, allow decentralization or spontaneity to flourish, because then your loyal masses would be replaced with a multitude of self-organized, creative, and liberated people.

Concrete Proposals for a Self-Organized Plaza

--Replace the monopoly of the commissions with a multiplication of organizing groups. Multiple kitchens, multiple communication and extension groups, with more autonomy, more fluidity, more possibility to develop diverse forms for diverse tastes, more space for everyone's participation without creating silenced minorities. These groups would communicate among themselves, collaborating when they consider it opportune.

--Convert the Central Assembly into a general encounter for exchanging information and resources, and generating a collective environment and consciousness. Here one could make proposals in order to seek support and allies, but without obliging everyone to sign on. If we don't have spokespeople, we don't need unified texts either. If we don't have leaders, we don't need homogenized actions. What unites us is the fact that we are here and we are self-organizing our resistance.

Down with centralization! Up with self-organization!