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When Corporatism Fails: Trade Union Strategies and Grassroots Resistance to the Spanish Economic Crisis

Dr. Jon Las Heras (Department of Politics, The University of Manchester)

Olatz Ribera-Almandoz (Department of Political and Social Sciences, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona)

Introduction

The eruption of the economic crisis in 2008-2010 did not only bring to the fore the contradictions of a mode of capital accumulation based on mass housing construction and property speculation, but it also thrust millions of workers and families to unemployment, poverty and precariousness of life. The situation has been exacerbated by the governmental imposition of severe austerity policies, which have displaced them from welfare state corporatist agreements (López and Rodríguez 2011; Charnock *et al*. 2014). This paper analyses the fragmented strategies and class responses to the socioeconomic crisis in Spain, tracing trade unions' path-dependencies and new social movements' forms of class struggle.

The article first outlines a theoretical framework that locates labour in the centre of the analysis of class agency and historical change. This implies placing workers' strategies and practices within an open, relational and complex historical setting. After a brief methodological note, the paper traces the progressive institutionalisation of the major Spanish trade unions – Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) and Union General de Trabajadores (UGT)–, which have prioritized the defence of social dialogue and corporatism in order to re-launch the economy in a context of global competition over the

adoption of more radical strategies. It also shows how the incremental substitution of sector-level collective bargaining agreements by company-level micro-corporatist strategies contributed to the fragmentation of economic interests and collective solidarity within the working class. In the following section, we explore the new forms of class struggle that emerged during the crisis in response to those limitations. In particular, we focus on the prefigurative practices and direct action strategies adopted by new autonomous movements such as the 15-M, the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) or radical strikes of Panrico. In so doing, this article argues that corporatist practices pave the ground for their own dismissal, as new, more inclusive and subversive forms of working class struggle have questioned the status quo and tried to engage into a more radical transformation. Finally, we provide several conclusions.

Locating Class Agency for Strategic Purposes

In order to grasp the multiple forms in which workers, class organisations and social movements have struggled against the capitalist crisis in Spain and understand their potentiality to become a revolutionary force, this article departs from a labour centred class perspective. This approach appears not only intuitive but also strategically necessary for two reasons. First, it allows us to articulate a contextualised historiography of the working class as a relevant actor in the production – and contestation– of capitalist social relations of production. This includes the analysis of the collective forms in and through which different struggles have mobilised and organised, and how they have shaped capitalist social structures. The majority of the insights provided by the critical political economy literature have tended to focus on capital and on structures of domination, while they underestimated social struggle and the disruptive potential of labour and other subjectivities (Huke *et al*. 2015). We argue, however, that we need to move towards historical accounts *from*

below – that is, *from* and *for* the workers and the socially disempowered –, as it will not only enrich social imaginary but also give credence to the historical importance of the subjectivity of 'subaltern classes' and their potential for emancipatory and transformative action (Gramsci 1971; Green 2002).

Second, departing from a *class* perspective focused on labour also brings to the fore the limits and possibilities of workers' *strategic* actions within the capitalist political economies in which they are embedded. In the absence of any contemporary revolutionary process that paves the ground for transcending capitalist relations, workers, class organisations and social movements find themselves trapped in either accepting or coming to terms with the 'rules of the game' (e.g. Gramsci 1971: 323-26; Hyman 1989: 40-46, 109-116). However, all historical forms in and through which capitalism comes to being –including both social democracy and neo-corporatist relations, or neoliberalism and global competition– are historically contested and transformed, and embody the seeds for their own dismissal (e.g. Panitch 1981; Jessop 1990; 2013; Harvey 2014).

Furthermore, this open nature of capitalist relations of production, we argue, has two main implications. On the one hand, all capitalist attempts to dominate and discipline labour are necessarily provisional and incomplete, and therefore potentially subject to resistance, contestation and disruption (Huke *et al*. 2015; Bailey *et al.* forthcoming). On the other hand, class struggle does not need to be revolutionary in order to transform capitalism. Due to the open nature of capitalist regulation and the subsequent geographical and historical diversity of contemporary capitalism, class struggles can unfold and crystallize in a myriad of forms generating a complex ontology of relations of domination (Ebenau *et al.* 2015; Wright 2010). Thus, multiple and variegated relations of oppression (e.g. gender, ethnic, culture), along with 'pure' class relations, are co-constitutive of capitalist domination (McNally 2015). In consequence, social groups suffering from multiple forms of domination become potential allies of the 'working class' in the contestation and transcendence of the capitalist system (Gramsci 1971: 52-61, 260-67, 350; Green 2002: 393-99; McNally 2015: 139-

145). Hence, it is of utter importance that critical perspectives develop an account not only for the strategies of resistance and new forms of emancipatory and prefigurative action developed by the working class, but also of the –historically contextualised– contradictions of specific forms of class struggle and emancipatory imaginaries.

Moreover, the 'strategic field' wherein class struggles unfold comprises economic, political and ideological relations of class power (Gramsci 1971: 133-37, 178-79; Poulantzas 2014[1978]: 26; also Shields *et al*. 2011; Jessop 2008). This article directs attention to the ideological/civil society relations in the articulation of class strategies against capitalist domination.[1] Thus, it focuses on the multiple forms in which – more or less organised – workers and disempowered groups attempt to generate new discourses, build associational ties or bridge inclusive coalitions and solidarities with and in between different agents of civil society; hence, forming or consolidating new disruptive and emancipatory subjectivities. More specifically, it analyses the prefigurative dynamics by which, through the creation of alternative spaces of more egalitarian and solidaristic social relations that attempt to disrupt patterns of domination, subversive actors expect to gradually replace the existing political order and to contribute in the creation of a new society (Graeber 2009; Maeckelbergh 2011). Put differently, strategic action suggests us to focus on the power relations constituting any social formation so that we can foresee alternative futures and engage with the present in order to transform or transcend it.

Furthermore, building upon feminist approaches to critical political economy, this paper uses a broad concept of worker that encompasses not only conventional waged forms of labour, but also a heterogeneous range of practices necessary for the reproduction of labour power that are often underestimated and marginalised because of their generally unpaid and invisible nature (e.g. Dalla

[1] As Ollman (2003) points out, this can be traced as a methodological step in grasping the concrete and complex into the abstract and simple in thought.

Costa and Dalla Costa 1998; Katz 2001; Bezanson and Luxton 2006). In this inclusive sense, workers are defined by their subordination to the capitalist logic, that is, by their vulnerability to being subsumed under dynamics of exploitation (and production of value) in order to guarantee their means of subsistence (Cleaver 2003; Bailey *et al.* forthcoming). As a result, traditional or radical unions, social movements, popular assemblies or critical social media, among many others, can be located as relevant working class actors exerting their ideological class power in global capitalism (e.g. Morton 2007; Kelly 2011; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013; Brookes 2013).

Radical political economy literature has stressed the impasse in which traditional unions find themselves as a result of recursively embracing corporatist and social dialogue strategies in global capitalism. This points to the formation of working class fractions and the possibility of including or excluding workers under specific corporatist agreements at different organisational and geographical scales, which are nevertheless provisional and limited due to the irredeemably contradictory nature of capitalist societies (Panitch 1981: 20-24; Jessop 1990: 136-38; Upchurch *et al*. 2009: 10-11; Fowler 2012: 498). In contrast to concessionary strategies, others have argued about the necessity to engage into more democratic, inclusive and subversive struggles to transform the current and decaying balance of class forces (e.g. Fairbrother 2008; Upchurch *et al*. 2009; Ness 2014). Thus, by departing from a workers' class perspective, this article provides a nuanced historiography that locates working class struggles at the centre of the analysis, whilst it also engages with the limits and possibilities that various class organisations and social movements have faced. Understanding the current contradictions of Spanish workers' agency cannot be but a necessary reflexive moment in the articulation of new and future forms of emancipatory action.

Methodological Note

In seeking to analyse the divergent forms of resistance that trade unions and grassroots movements and organisations have developed in Spain, this article resorts to a non-positivist and critical approach to social sciences (Sayer 2010; Jäger *et al*. 2016). This presupposes the impossibility to find 'the truth' in an absolute and trans-historical sense. On the contrary, we depart from a historicist approach (e.g. Bieler and Morton 2001; Las Heras 2017) that articulates a set of theoretical propositions that can allow us to make sense of the complexity of social relations and their evolution within specific historical frameworks of power relations, e.g. gender, ethnic or class relations. Our goal is therefore to provide a profound understanding of the complexity of historical events, to ~~explore~~ analyse the subjective experiences of the people and the meanings that they associate to such experiences, and to explore possible routes towards disruption and emancipation.

Furthermore, to understand the multiple on-going social struggles in Spanish territory and the selection of specific strategic modes of action by different class actors, a qualitative method of analysis becomes crucial. Engaging into in-depth interviews, for example, allows trade unionists or social activists to express themselves and provide their own interpretation of historical events and their engagement with them (Devine 2002; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).This article builds upon the fieldwork that both authors have performed in Spanish territory in the period 2011-2016 and draws on multiple qualitative sources. Our main research materials include eighty-nine in-depth semi-structured interviews with union officers and affiliates from the two main Spanish trade union confederations – CCOO and UGT –; with other smaller, radical and pro-independence unions in the Autonomous Communities of Catalonia and Basque Country; and with participants in a range of autonomous social movements, organisations and events taking place since 2008. The latter comprises the striking workers from Panrico, 15M activists, and members of the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (Platform of People Affected by Mortgages, PAH). Our sources also comprise activist participant observation of key events and actions, including the general strikes and subsequent demonstrations held in 2010 and 2012, different assemblies of the 15M and the PAH

movements, and multiple occupations of bank offices, empty homes, workplaces and public squares. Finally, we analysed secondary texts such as internal documents and video footages produced by collective actors, political statements, and media content. This, we expect, will bring a rather holistic and rich understanding of different workers´ agency during and after the 2008 crisis.

Once Again: In Times of Crisis Dominant Spanish Unions Resort to Social Dialogue

To understand the current dead-lock wherein institutionalised trade unions are trapped and the contrasting alternative approaches that grass-root worker and social movements have pursued, it will be useful to swiftly review the history of Spanish trade unionism. The two main Spanish trade unions experienced a progressive centralisation of their organisational structures and of the collective bargaining processes that regulate employer-employee relations since the Spanish transition started in 1975. The major radical, communist and social movement inspired union formed during Francoism – Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) – fell trapped in between pursuing more radical and pre-revolutionary strategies or choosing a more moderate path and embracing 'industrial legality'. Closely, the other major trade union – the social-democrat Union General de Trabajadores (UGT) – sought to organise class grievances through institutional mechanisms that progressively demobilised the rank-and-file. A *dual* industrial relations framework was established in 1980 wherein trade unions had to engage into union elections if they wanted to represent workers, both at the works council, and at the sector and cross-sector levels. Engaging in these became indispensable if they wanted to participate in collective bargaining and social dialogue.

During the later 1970s and early 1980s, in a context of economic crisis, industrial restructuring, and increasing labour market competition that derived from European neoliberal integration, CCOO's

leadership progressively aligned with UGT's corporatist strategies in an exemplary case of *transformismo.* Both unions embraced the European oriented model of industrial relations and signed several tripartite pacts in order to restore economic growth, control popular mobilisation and consolidate the formation of a liberal capitalist democracy. Tensions between both unions nevertheless existed, and a the stable coalition - which lasts up until today did not materialise until late 1980s, after both trade unions had distanced themselves from their ideologically ally political parties. Radical unions like the anarcho-syndicalist Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo (CNT), which chose not to participate in trade union elections and could not coordinate radical fractions into the organisation of widespread subversive struggles, were marginalised from the construction of this industrial relations framework.[2]

The centralised, hierarchical and relatively passive nature of the collective bargaining system has allowed trade unions to regulate working conditions in different sectors without necessarily engaging the rank-and-file due to the *erga omnes* clause. This legal clause establishes that those unions who have won a representative status in union elections can negotiate with the employer associations the conditions of the entire sector regardless the workforce is unionised or not. Collective agreements negotiated mostly at sector scale have formally covered between 70%-80% of the workforce, e.g. around 467 collective agreements covered up to 8.7 million workers in 2005 (Fernández-Rodríguez *et al*. 2016a: 270; 2016b: 501-502). The legitimation of UGT and CCOO as class organisations derives from the fact that more than 60% of the workforce can participate in union elections every four years (although only 35% approximately do), and that both organisations accumulate more than 70% of the total votes (Alos et al. 2015: 102). Therefore, whilst union density has remained relatively low (around 16%-18%), UGT and CCOO remain the most representative class organisations in Spain due to their capacity to mobilise large shares of the workforce into voting (Beneyto *et al.* 2016). Simultaneously, UGT and CCOO have resorted to general strikes as a pressure

[2] For a review of this historical process, see e.g. Martinez-Lucio (1992), Hamann (1997), Köhler and Calleja-Jiménez (2013).

mechanism to remain politically influential in social dialogue practices (Luque-Balbona 2012; Molina and Barranco 2016).

At state level, social dialogue between trade unions, employer associations and the state has been fluid until the 2008 crisis (Molina and Rhodes 2011), when it was truncated (Luque-Balbona and Gonzalez-Begega 2016). CCOO's and UGT's insistence on promoting social dialogue derives from their objective to be politically representative class organisations in a country that lacks a social democratic history both at the political institutions and at the workplace. As in many other European countries, the fruits of social dialogue for the Spanish workers have been rather scant, if not counterproductive (Martinez-Lucio 2016). Despite numerous social pacts that have sought to reduce gender inequality, incorporate migrant workers, expand the structure of collective bargaining or support labour training programs, the Spanish state has kept the most important powers away from trade unions: labour law remains a parliamentary issue, the state has not created a strong judicial system and body of labour judges that could supervise and make collective agreements of effective implementation, and trade unions have not been allowed to engage in the formation of progressive macroeconomic policy making (Hamman and Martinez-Lucio 2003; Martinez-Lucio 2016). Instead, social dialogue has been a practice in and through which the capitalist class has been able to assure its hegemonic position in Spain by co-opting union elites and allow them to present them as working class legitimate actors, but with little political power in increasingly deregulated and globalised labour markets (Martinez-Lucio 2016: 75-82).

To sum up, both unions articulated their strategies under two main pillars before 2008: (A) the production of collective agreements to protect workers across sectors, regardless their status as union members; and (B) the mobilization of workers in specific structure-conjunctures to remain the politically referential class organisations at different representative levels. Other trade unions, like the anarcho-syndicalist CNT and CGT, or the Basque pro-independence Euskal Langileen Alkartasuna

(ELA) and Langile Abertzaleen Batzordeak (LAB), which adopted more confrontational strategies towards collective bargaining through mobilising the rank-and-file, denounced UGT's and CCOO's strategic conservatism, their entrenchment into the state's corporatist apparatuses and their dependence on institutional financial support; thus arguing that they do not serve the interests of the *entire* working class (e.g. Elorrieta 2017).

However, since the late 1980s, trade union membership steadily changed in Spain. The shift from a peripheral-industrial economy to a service and asset-bubble economy, and the increasing fragmentation of the labour force as a result of multiple labour reforms that enabled temporary contracts, partial contracts, internal and external flexibility measures, eroded important sectors of unions´ 'industrial core.' Service sector, especially public sector workers, became the new strong-hold (Jódar *et al*. 2011Alos *et al*. 2015).

Trade unions' relative complacency to these structural shifts, made them lose power in organising and mobilising the rank-and-file in collective bargaining. In many cases, CCOO and UGT were crucial actors in the negotiation of ´competitiveness pacts´ that introduced substantial dual-wage-scales and time-flexibility (Las Heras 2016). This not only eroded the working conditions of a large share of the workforce, but it also fragmented class solidarity as senior workers benefited from wage increases while the new entrants saw substantial wage reductions. Union delegates argued that their class strategy, which found managerial support, was to preserve and consolidate competitiveness since it was indispensable to endure increasingly global competition. It was the case of a Mercedes-Benz's car assembly factory in Vitoria (Basque Country), in which a ´competitiveness pact´ was signed in 2011 as a way out of the economic crisis and increasing unemployment rates. The primordial strategy for UGT in Mercedes-Benz-Vitoria became:

> 'that during the following years our factory shall not be compared with any other [factory] of the Daimler-Group. That when the moment of allocating vehicles [i.e. capital investments] comes, the viability of our factory is not questioned by the management. That from our side, in terms of regulated flexibility, augmented productivity or workers´ formation, we are *ever* put into question. In the moment that other factories stand in the way of our negotiations, we will have a problem'.[3]

Furthermore, temporary workers' union activism decreased substantially during that period for two reasons. First, the co-responsibility of their unionised colleagues for their increasing immiseration undermined the legitimacy of trade unions as inclusive class organisations (e.g. Benassi and Dorigatti 2015). Second, due to managerial systematic filtering of radical workers affiliated to other unions, UGT and CCOO displaced other class organisations from challenging their dominant discourses. This produced a spiral of nepotism between managers and different worker strata in which the commitment to corporate profitability was defended at the expense of working class unity and the economic conditions for younger generations (see Figure 1). In the absence of more confrontational forms of class action, 'social dialogue' aimed at making wage-labour sustainable became a self-defeating strategy as larger working class fractions were expelled from the benefits of adopting concessive standpoints.

[3] Interview to UGT delegate member of the Mercedes-Benz-Vitoria works council (10/04/2015).

Figure 1. Wage Share in Manufacturing Industry. Source: AMECO Database

After the eruption of the global financial meltdown in 2008, and appealing to the need for a deeper deregulation and flexibility of labour market, two consecutive labour reforms were promoted in 2010 and 2012 under the PSOE and PP governments, respectively. The new legislation not only reduced severance pays and allowed companies to reduce workers' wages according to their profits, but also intensified the decentralization of collective bargaining to the company level and increased the individualization of labour relations (Clua-Losada and Ribera-Almandoz 2017). Despite the organization of three general strikes between 2010 and 2012, the established trade unions were unable to resist the implementation these labour reforms that curtailed even more their structural power and undermined their ability to protect both unionized and non-unionized workers through the use of sector-level agreements (Flesher-Fominaya 2015a; Rodríguez-Ruiz 2014).

The ambivalent role played by UGT and CCOO before the crisis continued after 2008, when they moved 'erratically' from positions of corporatism to those of mobilisation in order to remain

institutionally representative actors (Campos-Lima and Martin-Artiles 2011; Perez-de-Guzmán *et al*. 2016). More concretely, UGT and CCOO organised three general strikes against both centre-left and centre-right governments' labour reforms and engaged into various coalitions with different social movements in order to denounce austerity and labour market reforms (Luque-Balbona and Gonzalez-Begega 2016). However, they also engaged into the negotiation of overarching agreements in 2010, 2012 and 2015 that would restore investors' confidence via wage moderation and increasing internal flexibility, such as establishing wage ceilings or deepening dual-wage-scales, increasing bank-hours and functional flexibility (Molina and Miguélez 2013: 22-24). The objective of these agreements was to reduce the hardship of the austerity and deregulation policies that the Spanish government was going to impose if it were not because of 'social dialogue' (Fernández-Rodríguez *et al*. 2016a). However, and as Perez-de-Guzman *et al*. argue, if UGT and CCOO

> 'aim of maintaining their political influence and their institutional statues […] which supposes sharing responsibility for the implementation of adjustments and cutbacks, they will [also] be exposed to the dissatisfaction of their grass-roots and the erosion of their legitimacy as representatives of general social interests and as political intermediaries' (Perez-de-Guzman *et al*. 2016: 466).

By 2013 unemployment rates had skyrocketed to nearly 27% – more than 55% for young workers who held temporary conditions and were easier to get fired – and real-wages decreased by 10% between 2008-2014 (Alos *et al.* 2015). Mounting contradictions generated strategic divisions within the unions (Darlignton 2013), between those better-off workers and union elites that thought of 'competitive corporatism' as the way forward in order to re-store economic and social stability, and those expelled workers and more radical union members that sought to articulate anti-establishment and class solidarity discourses in order to transform their increasingly dire conditions.

The Prefigurative Turn: Subverting Corporatism with New Forms of Resistance

Spain witnessed a widespread wave of popular dissatisfaction that manifested the profound crisis of legitimacy of the political and economic system, and confronted new attempts to secure class domination (Langman 2013; Bailey *et al*. 2016). Social unrest quickly gained momentum, and class struggles shifted towards novel and more radical forms of resistance based on autonomous self-organisation, prefigurative practices and direct action. The 15-M movement represented one of the most visible expressions of this anti-austerity cycle of class struggle using new models of resistance. It was extraordinarily successful in eroding the hegemonic neoliberal narrative that considered austerity and welfare retrenchment, as well as the limitation of substantive labour and democratic rights, as an economic necessity to reverse the recessive trends (Bruff 2014).

The 15-M movement was organized around the occupation of public squares –later transferred to neighbourhood assemblies–, and it used horizontal and deliberative democratic practices as its main organizing principles (Flesher Fominaya 2015a). As for its strategies of resistance, it combined traditional methods such as marches, strikes and demands for material concessions, with more innovative tactics of contention including: direct actions and occupations, civil disobedience, cyberactivism and the development of autonomous collective projects. These experiences are related to a prefigurative and strategic conception of democracy and political action, namely the idea that, in order subvert existing social relations, the internal organisation of the struggle should embody the principles they are pursuing. The prefiguration adopted by the 15-M –and other parallel movements– involves the use of direct and radical forms of democracy, deliberative and consensus seeking practices, non-permanent and non-representative delegation of responsibilities and civil disobedience, among others. For a 15-M activist,

> the key thing is to prove that if we want something, we can make it happen. We occupied the Barcelona Stock Exchange, bank offices, government departments… We want to prove that people can change things […]. We try to prove it with our practices, not without words; we try to show that there are many things that can be done, that we can build a better life.[4]

The critique posed by the 15-M was not circumscribed to the management of the crisis, but extended to representative democracy and the institutional channels of social and political representation. This included the main trade unions, especially their leaders, and Left political parties, which were seen as unable to resist the deterioration of the material conditions of existence, the widening inequalities and the high levels of political corruption. In this sense, in spite of the collaboration of the 15-M, the main trade unions and several radical trade unions in the organization of various protests and in the general strikes of 2012 (Perez-de-Guzman et al. 2016: 467-471), public trust on CCOO and UGT was undermined substantially (Molina and Barranco 2016: 388). Slogans such as "PPSOE", "They don't represent us", or "CCOO and UGT, unions of the ruling power" directed to the institutional Left show how they were perceived as being part of the problem. As a participant in the 15-M movement explains:

> [in Spain,] collective bargaining and social dialogue have traditionally characterized the functioning of trade unions. When the crisis began, we were told that there wouldn't be more social dialogue or more negotiations. If they wanted to cut your salary, they would just cut your salary. If they wanted to fire you, they would just fire you. We decided we needed new organizational models, both in the political and in the social domains. In new situations we need to construct new alternatives. So we organized in different social movements, which are much more horizontal and don't require financial contributions. They are similar to what

[4] Interview to a participant in the 15-M movement in Barcelona (13/11/2015).

> CCOO used to be in its origins during the period of clandestinity, when it wasn't a trade union but an anti-fascist and pro-democratic political movement.[5]

Furthermore, the use of autonomous spaces organized through prefigurative principles, together with the use of broad political messages and the absence of specific political programmes –as represented in the slogan "Democracia Real YA!" (Real Democracy NOW!)–, rapidly attracted a large number of people to the occupied squares. In consequence, the 15-M mobilized people with a wide range of backgrounds, interests and demands, which increasingly developed different thematic commissions and working groups (e.g. housing and energy poverty, health, education, social services). This process of grassroots community reorganization eventually triggered the emergence of an entire ecosystem of autonomous workers' movements and struggles aiming to challenge the strategies articulated by dominant trade unions and to construct alternative spaces of resistance wherein some of the internal vices and contradictions of the institutional Left were transcended. This instigated the formation of manifold Tides [*mareas*], a thematically-organized ensemble of social movements that brought together public sector workers and users mobilizing against austerity and against the degradation of public services and social rights. In this sense, the White Tide [*Marea Blanca*] and the Green Tide [*Marea Verde*] are instances of grassroots movements fighting against the privatisation and neoliberal restructuration of healthcare and education services, respectively.[6]

In the private sector, the radical strike action of Panrico workers exemplifies the emergence of new forms of rank-and-file self-organisation and incorporation of prefigurative radical methods learned during the 15-M in workers' struggles. In 2013, the workers of Panrico in Santa Perpètua de la Mogoda (Barcelona) decided to initiate an indefinite strike and to settle a protest camp outside their factory in order to stop the company's drastic collective redundancy plan and salary cuts. The

[5] Interview to a participant in the 15-M in Barcelona, activist in the senior people anti-austerity movement Iai@flautas, and member of CCOO during the last years of Francoism (Barcelona, 03/06/2014).
[6] For a more detailed analysis of the aims, repertoire of action and impact of the Tides, see Luque Balbona and González Begega (2016) and Bailey *et al* (forthcoming).

campaign, which lasted eight months and was one of the longest strike actions carried out in Spain since the restoration of democracy in the 1970s, used horizontal, open and self-organized weekly assemblies to coordinate collective action and the life at the camp. Moreover, the strikers used a complex strategy that targeted not only the company, but also the Catalan Government and the leadership of the main trade union in the manufacturing plant, CCOO – of which more than 90% of workers were members –, for failing to represent the interests of the workers and for accepting Panrico's restructuring programme. The confrontation between the works committee and rank-and-file CCOO members, on the one hand, and the leaders of their trade union on the other hand, was described by one of the strikers in the following way:

> The argument of some trade union leaders was that the company wanted to negotiate but that it wouldn't do so until we called off the strike. So they told us to go back to work and to start the negotiations from within. But what unites us is that we're all in the streets, and that we're making decisions in this space called "assembly". And trade unions are not used to it.[7]

The influence of the 15-M movement on this strike is not only visible in the use of prefigurative assemblies and in the confrontation between rank-and-file trade union members and their leaders, but also in the creation of a strong solidarity network with other strikes and campaigns to join forces and implement cooperative actions (Benítez and Rosetti 2016). This included a continued alliance with the striking workers of Coca-Cola's factory in Fuenlabrada (Madrid), the PAH, student movements and different anti-austerity campaigns, among others. Furthermore, the workers joined the Labour Coordinator and Mutual Support 15-M, a platform created by the 15-M's Labour Commissions in order to coordinate and unite multiple grassroots workers' struggles. As one of the workers joining the strike explains, the collaboration with the 15-M movement did not only enhance

[7] Interview to a striking Panrico worker and rank-and-file member of CCOO (Santa Perètua de la Mogoda, Barcelona 27/05/2014).

their capacity for cooperative actions, but was also a source of practical knowledge for the campaigners:

> When we started the strike, we didn't know what a strike fund was, or how to organize and coordinate... The trade union [CCOO] didn't teach us either. Instead, it was people from the 15-M movement who told us: open a bank account and create a strike fund, because as time goes by you'll need people's solidarity. And we did it, and currently we can live thanks to the solidarity of people. Because the money we have in the strike fund is being used so that those families that have no other resources can shop at the supermarket, can pay the water and energy bills and other expenses, although many of us had to stop paying our mortgages. And this was thanks to the solidarity of people, of ordinary people, and not of trade unions.[8]

The sustained use of direct actions such the strike and the settlement of the protest camp, the collective deliberation at the workers' assemblies, and the establishment of the external solidarity network were fundamental to the establishment of a sense of unity and collective consciousness among the workers. Thus, the example of Panrico shows how workers were able to adapt the forms of grassroots and prefigurative democracy learned during the 15-M to their struggles and to organize their collective action outside the established channels.

Moreover, this cycle of resistance went beyond the limits of the traditional factory and extended throughout the community of the social factory, embracing important aspects of social reproduction, such as housing, energy poverty, or environmentalism and sustainability (see Cleaver 2003: 70-72). In fact, one of the social movements that had a significant role in the formation of the 15-M and was, at the same time, fuelled by it was the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca, PAH). The PAH was created in Barcelona in 2009, when

[8] Interview to a striking Panrico worker, rank-and-file member of CCOO and member of the strike committee (Santa Perètua de la Mogoda, Barcelona 27/05/2014).

the spread of unemployment and the decline in wages lead hundreds of thousands of households to foreclosure and eviction due to their incapacity to repay their mortgage debts. As other 15-M related movements, the PAH is a network-based, grassroots collective movement that functions through a complex net of solidarities and mutual support between the autonomous nodes that have been created in multiple cities (Colau and Alemany 2012). Furthermore, it uses civil disobedience and direct action to defend the right to decent housing and to confront financial and political elites. In this sense, the PAH employs different political actions such as occupying banks and city council offices, stopping evictions or occupying empty housing blocks and apartments that are property of banks to relocate evicted families.

The class strategy developed by this housing movement combines demands for an improvement of the housing policies and legislation,[9], the collective negotiation of debt cancellation with banks, and the use of autonomous, prefigurative politics (Bailey *et al*. 2016; Flesher Fominaya 2015b). On the one hand, the PAH's organization and activity embody prefigurative principles such as deliberation and consensus-seeking practices, horizontality, and decentralisation. Each of PAH's autonomous nodes is organized around an open assembly, where affected individuals and families share their experiences collectively in order to give and receive legal advice and psychological support. A distinctive characteristic of these housing movements is that their social basis is essentially formed by people threatened by processes of foreclosure and eviction who, through the collectivisation of individual social crises, become political activists (Macías 2013; Colau and Alemany 2012). The collectivisation of cases is an extremely empowering and transformative tool, since it reveals that problems perceived as an individual failure are in fact the result of social relations based upon class domination and exploitation.

[9] For example, in its first public campaign, the PAH in collaboration with CCOO, UGT and other social groups and organizations, gathered 1,400,000 signatures in order to start a Citizen-initiated Law in favour of social housing and the removal of mortgage debt after eviction processes, an initiative that was refused by the Spanish Congress in 2013. However, the cooperation between the PAH and the main trade unions was goal-driven and limited in time, and did not lead to a more extensive and deep alliance.

Prefigurative politics can also be found in the PAH's *Obra Social* campaign, which helps affected families to reoccupy their foreclosed homes or to occupy empty housing blocks owned by financial institutions. Following the principles of self-protection and self-provision of housing rights, this campaign aims to establish autonomous and non-marketized forms of social reproduction by develop alternative means through which affected people and local residents can seek to improve their access to housing and can co-exist on an everyday basis. Through processes of collective creation, the PAH has contributed to the communalisation and self-organisation of collective spaces of social reproduction and care zones, including nurseries, kitchens and vegetable gardens. As a PAH activist explains,

> The PAH is, in a sense, very similar to an old clandestine labour union. It's not only about the self-protection of our rights and the opposition to the government and the state. It's about the creation of alternatives, of new spaces and models for our daily lives and for our coexistence. We want to be autonomous, self-sufficient with respect to the system.[10]

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Therefore, rather than offering practical solutions to individual problems, the PAH has become a space of political socialization that helps workers from different genders, origins, ages, cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds and with various employment situations –to disrupt individualized subjectivities and re-gain (collective) political agency. Such innovative form of class struggle expanded the economistic tendencies of trade unions that focused fundamentally on collective bargaining, and actually engaged into giving a direct solution to the problems that social dialogue practices could not provide.

[10] Interview to a PAH and 15-M activist (Sabadell, Barcelona 20/08/2013).

Conclusion

The analysis offered in this article explains how variegated working class struggles arose in the context of socioeconomic crisis, fiscal austerity and entrenchment of neoliberal labour reforms in Spain. Fundamentally, it has shown how grassroots and autonomous social movements have articulated new forms of class resistance in their attempt to transcend strategically conservative trade unions. The contradictions of corporatism became particularly prominent after 2010, when CCOO and UGT adopted a very ambivalent role that combined attempts to establish alliances with new forms of class agency with efforts to restore the social dialogue with employer associations and the government. Indeed, the signature by CCOO and UGT of several bipartite pacts that restricted wage growth and introduced further time and functional flexibility 'in defence of employment and economic growth' seems to proof that the mistrust of the grassroots movements was relatively well-grounded. The incapacity of trade unions to organise an increasing proportion of workers, including unemployed and precarious workers, has been challenged by the latter through the establishment of new and more radical forms of resistance and mobilisation based on autonomous self-organisation, prefigurative practices and direct action. In this sense, the 15-M movement, the PAH and the radical strike actions performed by the workers of Panrico have been used to exemplify the dynamic re-composition of the social relations within working class in order to disrupt neoliberal capitalism. Their critique extends far beyond the management of the crisis, as it includes not only demands for material concessions and equality, but also for changes in the current model of representative democracy and the institutional channels of social and political representation in Spain.

Notwithstanding their emancipatory and subversive potential, the experiences of the 15-M, Panrico or the PAH have also been limited for multiple reasons. Although a more detailed explanation of the problems that these movements have faced exceeds the limits of this study, it is not clear to what extent the solidarity networks created by these innovative but rather fragmented struggles will

solidify in more permanent structures and will be able to organise an effective, strong and inclusive counter-hegemonic class movement.

On a final note, the rise of the political party Podemos, or the local candidacies Ahora Madrid or Barcelona en Comú (lead by the former PAH spokesperson Ada Colau), which are currently in control of the municipal government of their respective cities, shows the reach of the discourses and practices implemented by the new autonomous movements. The transfer of prefigurative politics and principles to representative institutions that act within the social boundaries of capitalism might present certain problems for the construction of emancipatory collective identities, and will need to be further explored. This article, instead, has focused on how new forms of class struggle appeared in Spain due to the limitations of concessive and corporatist traditional unionism.

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