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Occupy Movement - An opportunity for demilitarisation

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The 15-M movement - which began occupying city squares in the state of Spain on May 15 - has not emerged as a movement with necessarily overt antimilitarist, pacifist or nonviolent overtones. It has, however, from its very inception declared itself as “pacifist”, and conducted its protests through “peaceful means” and “without violence”. Without having carried out a detailed analysis of what this means exactly I can say that the many thousands of people in the squares of the Spanish State, have opted to carry out actions and raise their voices without using violence.

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Nonviolence

The development of this element has led to the 15-M movement as nonviolent, but it does not necessarily embrace the nonviolent logic which promotes the rejection of violence in a holistic way, in all areas of life and society, as the coherent path to follow, in order to create a culture of peace.

Nonviolence is mainly understood as a strategy, as a way of ensuring that their protest actions are embraced by the society and the media. But it is also true that there are many people who are indignadxs who consciously or subconsciously, are questioning militarization by simply defining themselves as nonviolent. This organic questioning of militarization, one of the basic pillars of the oppressive system which they are criticising and attempting to change is evident throughout the 15-M movement. The ways in which the use of machista and discriminatory language are avoided or rejected in the 15-M assemblies, the use of horizontal methodology, the rejection of imposed leadership and the use of consensus based decision making are all part of a strategy which de-legitimises militarist practices.

Military spending

Even though it is true that the role of the army, war, or arms trading have not been amongst the priorities of the 15-M protest movement, there have been many assemblies which have organised (and continue to do so) training seminars which include the debate on the militarization of society. For example, talks have been given on military spending, arms trading, the economic-military cycle and the financing of the arms industry and war. They have even created, at least in Barcelona, a sub-commission of topics under the name of Anti-war mongering and Non violence, which looks at incorporating these issues within the work dynamic of the indignadx movement.

An issue that has been readily accepted in the 15-M movement is the critical link between the economic crisis and military spending and provides an excellent opportunity for furthering work against militarism. The crisis is the backdrop to the explosion of indignation that sparked this social movement. The people are looking for answers which explain why there is a lack of resources for even basic services and that provide alternative solutions to the drastic budget cuts in the health, education and social services sector that have occurred across the Spanish State.

The vast amount of Spanish military spending for the maintenance of a disproportionate military structure, through the purchasing of new arms, military investment in R+D and their participation in military operations abroad, is increasingly being coupled with arguments which confirm how the movement is trying to look for alternative solutions to the crisis. The so called Contents Commission, which is trying to create a basic programme of consensus which would be used to influence political parties and governments, has, from the start, included the reduction in military

spending as part of their basic demands. This is good news for the anti-militarist and pacifist groups, because it is certainly not a coincidence that this demand be included in the largest Spanish social movement in recent times. Work carried out by peace activists to raise awareness about militarism has born fruit within this movement. The current challenge is to get the message across to those who make political decisions. In any case, the extraordinary capacity to communicate and disseminate information about the 15-M has become an opportunity to ensure that pacifist messages reach society and are then converted into political decisions. With general elections just round the corner, and within a context of cuts in public spending affecting those who have suffered most up until now, not only in Spain but throughout the world, there is now a window of opportunity for a drastic reduction in military spending and, consequently, in militarisation. However, in order to achieve this, the peace movement must double its efforts in order to include the reduction in military spending as one of the main demands of the 15-M and as a measure needed in order to face the economic crisis and avoid the collapse of the welfare state.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the 15-M is helping disseminate a pacifist message within society and, at the same time, the pacifist movements, both within and from outside of the 15-M, are helping to ensure that this be a social movement based on peaceful means and which proposes the reduction in military spending. The joint challenge in the future is to ensure that the 15-M becomes more closely linked to non violence, to teach the indignadxs about these issues, to learn from non-violent direct action experiences and show that the crisis was caused by a corrupt and oppressive system: Capitalism.

Capitalism is a system which, in turn, is supported by economic, political and military pillars. Fighting against militarisation is struggling for radical social transformation. The 15-M must include pacifist values as their own but, in order for this to happen, those who work for peace must also integrate themselves within the 15-M. The La indignación is increasingly going international. The protests inspired by the movement have reached over 800 cities throughout the world. We are getting closer than ever to ensuring the support of a social majority, which is able to force political decisions in the coming years to include some of the historical pacifist demands. If I am optimistic about one thing, it is that although they have the arms and the money, we have reason on our side. The sensible thing would be not to spend on weapons, on wars and on violence.

Post-scriptum :

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