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# **Preliminary Conditions for Efficient Action of Radical Left Parties in Europe**

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## **Parties and Social Movements**

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The logo for the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (rls) consists of the lowercase letters 'rls' in a bold, sans-serif font. The 'r' and 'l' are black, while the 's' is red.

## 1. Foreword

The parties of the European radical left face a series of contradictions today. On the one hand, none of the most important objectives they aim for (peace, full employment, defence and development of the *welfare state*, extension of basic rights, environmental protection) can be attained or achieved without the construction of a united Europe, as a social-economical space as well as a *political* subject. On the other hand, however, the way in which the European unity is still being constructed by the leaders of the Old Continent does not offer instruments to left politics and excludes the parties from the radical left (but maybe all parties in a way) from the decision-making process. To investigate this contradiction and to define preconditions for radical left action, at least in a general fashion, we have to propose an estimation of the current state of the European Union.

In the globalisation era, as is now obvious to everyone, no income redistribution politics or struggle against inequality can be fought efficiently within the national sphere. The movements of financial capital make any relatively autonomous economic approach which is not carried out in the context of "regional" integration, or at least within an inter-state agreement, impossible or precarious. An example, besides the European Union itself, is the South American attempt to launch the Mercosur: an attempt not coincidentally opposed by the USA. Then there is the recent example of the WTO Ministerial in Cancun, where only the (momentary) unity of some of the countries hit most by neo-liberal globalisation, co-ordinated with the action of the global movements against neo-liberalism, succeeded in contesting the attempt at complete liberalisation of investment promoted by the US and the European Union. But it is even more obvious that the fundamental direction of neo-liberal globalisation can be inverted (and transformed into co-operation between economic areas based on reciprocity and equal exchange) only if it is possible to establish an economic subject, but especially political subject, which is capable of challenging the superpower USA, true director and principal beneficiary of the current course of world economy.

In short: no nationalist enclosure is possible for those who want to carry out leftist politics. The clearest example is shown in Venezuela (an experience which deserves more attention and solidarity from the European left): an important income redistribution in favour of the popular classes has led to strong social resistance and a situation of permanent political and institutional tension. These first led to coup attempts and are now open to all solutions, including the assassination of the President of the Republic. These same "Bolivarian" Venezuelans, or at least a large part of them, are the first to understand that their experience could only continue in connection with the experience of other South American states, and in relation to the global movements against neo-liberalism.

Now: the European Union seems to be the major candidate for constructing an internal economic space and re-balancing the global power relations which are capable of providing a framework towards a political turn in an anti-neo-liberal sense. Until today, however, this has solely remained a hope, and therefore the way in which the next big decisions of the European Union will be outlined (the adoption of a European Constitution and the Eastern enlargement) do not reveal any positive prospects. The fact is that the current European leaders seem to have neither an economic interest nor the political culture for constructing a true new large geopolitical subject. Maybe only the classes, parties and movements that are interested in true leftist politics can (and must) pursue the difficult aim of constructing such a subject.

## 2. Disillusioned Hopes: "Economic" Europe

It is a common opinion that the current state of the European economy is certainly not satisfactory, and there are no signs that it will become satisfactory in the short or mid-term. The unemployment data - and above all the most recent data on investment - all indicate a dangerous tendency towards stagnation and decline. Worse still: they seem to define a tendency towards predominance of the

services sector and a process of de-industrialisation which again favours some possibilities of short-term profit but does not fully guarantee the persistence of the Union as a top-level economic power.<sup>1</sup> The current stagnation phase could also moderately be corrected by a partial future increase in development. However, there are at least two important *structural* factors that prevent a real broad and balanced economic increase.

The first is the strong and increasing *regionalisation* of the European economy: a dynamic factor in times of growth, regionalisation accentuates social and economical imbalances within the individual States and within the Union. Furthermore, such imbalances, in phases of stagnation, constitute obstacles against an increase because they dangerously reduce complex demand. In some way the relations between the various regions reflect the class relations. They are left open to the play of the market; the unbalanced relations lead to an income reduction of the lower classes up to the critical point where the reduction is no longer an advantage to the whole system and become a factor, or co-factor, of the crisis. The application of the "perfect market" model to the relations between regional areas leads to a similar situation, a situation in which the state of Southern Italy is only one of several possible examples. It does not seem as if the European leaders could or would want to invert this tendency which is a general effect of globalisation. According to some, it is also a precise choice made by the US in pushing for a strong regionalisation of the European Union, with the aim of weakening it economically and politically.<sup>2</sup> The reduction of the European structural funds and the criteria for their distribution, oriented much more towards immediate remuneration than long-term development<sup>3</sup>, is therefore likely to aggravate imbalances, and the problem will even increase after the next EU enlargement.

The second and more important fact limiting the possibilities of equal development lies in the *general philosophy* guiding the economic actions of the European leaders. This philosophy, which directly represents the interests of financial capital<sup>4</sup>, is above all realised in the "Maastricht criteria" and the "stability pact". These are a true and real constraint which renders any consensual anti-cyclical public intervention - or even only changes which might mitigate some aspects of stagnation - impossible. It is not a coincidence that many states try to at least partially overcome some of these constraints through some accounting tricks. Neither is it a coincidence that there are numerous voices asking for a revision of the criteria and the agreement. Paradoxically, however, these are mostly voices from the right, since the left - with the exception of the extreme left - seems to have fully accepted the philosophy of "balanced public accounts" and the "fight against inflation". However, this is a philosophy which has no solid foundation at all from the point of view of economic analysis, whereas its political foundation is clear: the struggle against the public sector as a part of the more complex strategy directed towards weakening waged labour and forcing it towards over-exploitation. Furthermore, its re-distributive effect in favour of the ruling classes is also certain. In fact, in a time when inflation tends towards zero, prices and income are decreasing

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<sup>1</sup> Gemma Contin, "Europa-Italia, conti a perdere", in *Liberazione*, 13<sup>th</sup> Sept. 03

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Hillard, "Europa balcanizzata?", in *Liberazione* 07<sup>th</sup> Sept. 03

<sup>3</sup> Gianfranco Viesti and Francesco Prota, "Le prospettive della politica di coesione comunitaria in un'Europa allargata", in *Stato e mercato*, no. 1, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to emphasize that with the term *financial capital* I do not intend to refer to a certain group of capitalists who are distinguishable from the others and opposed to them (i.e. not the supposedly "bad speculators" against the "good" and "busy" industrials...). Certainly there are groups who are mainly or exclusively dedicated to gaining profit from financial operations. However, the financial form of capital directly interests the industrial capital itself. In periods of strong turbulences on the markets and continued war for industrial acquisitions and scientific research, there is a need for large masses of liquid money that is directly transferred into financial capital. Therefore there is no hope of an alliance of industrial capital against financial capital. They are two sides of the same coin, nowadays even more than ever. On the other hand, it is possible that strong contradictions could develop between the two different forms of capital.

(relatively) and the financial burden is not diminished. This is because debts may often have been negotiated in times of high inflation and because central banks continue their restrictive policies. This leads to a strong shift of income from the debtors (the workers and the state) to the creditors (the possessors of financial capital).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the motives which lead the European leaders to maintain the restrictive criteria decided at Maastricht, have little in common with a prospect of development. They have very much more in common with the immediate interests of the capitalists, concerning both industrial and financial capital, and with the aim of redefining the class relations to the advantage of the ruling classes.

Hence there is no possibility of initiating income redistribution in favour of the lower classes without evading the current economic criteria of the European Union. However, the situation is made even more difficult by the fact that overcoming the Maastricht criteria would be necessary but not sufficient, since it would require a real economic recovery, and therefore of employment, as well as a revival of a relatively self-sufficient and balanced development of European regions. This would most probably require initiatives which are not simply Keynesian. If it is necessary to counter de-industrialisation, it is necessary to construct a solid economic structure, coherent and capable of benefiting from all the advantages offered by the technological revolution; in fact, an *active* industrial policy is necessary. This would have to be based on a *programme* at least partially capable of intervening not only with regard to the quantity of the monetary resources available for productive goals (as in the traditional Keynesian formula), but also on the *quality* of public expenditure, on its composition, and on the kind of investment<sup>6</sup>. A simple increase in public spending, direct or indirect, would achieve more than favouring the current industrial and financial system with its activities of pure mediation and with its *labour saving* investment.

For once, in short, it would be necessary to truly learn from the US. In the US, as has rightly been affirmed, not only is the public deficit very high (and it is one of the basic reasons for the economic development of this country), but this deficit, furthermore, has a precise objective: public spending intervenes mainly on a variety of sectors chosen for their integration and for their economic and technological synergies, i.e. the famous military-industrial complex. Obviously it is not a question for the parties of the European radical left to suggest imitating US *warfare*, but to propose a public intervention aimed, consciously and programmatically, at other sectors which are integrated or can be integrated, as, for example, the sector of ecological production, compatible in connection with the development of technical-scientific education.

But the idea of a planned economic intervention, of an active industrial policy is very far from what the European governments, their political, scientific and administrative personnel want. And, unfortunately, it also seems far away from the ideas of the entire or nearly entire left that either accepts neo-liberalism or limits itself to re-suggesting neo-Keynesian recipes as slogans.

Given these conditions, there is indeed a long way to go before Europe truly turns into an alternative economic subject to the US and a seat of innovative economic policies.

### **3. Disillusioned Hopes: "Institutional" Europe**

A summarising analysis of the EU's current institutional balance made with reference to the constitution project elaborated by the Convent presided over by Giscard d'Estaing, can only confirm and strengthen the judgement we have just made.

It must be said straight away that the constitution project (which according to many should only be called "Treaty" to indicate the persistence of the sovereignty of the states), confirms and reinforces

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<sup>5</sup> Emiliano Brancaccio, "Le servitù di Maastricht", in "la rivista del Manifesto", no. 30, July/August 2002

<sup>6</sup> Riccardo Bellofiore, "Con e oltre Keynes", *ibidem*

the tendency to consider the European Union not as a federation, but as an institutional reality which only sees *intergovernmental* organisms as objects and protagonists. This considerably weakens the possibility of its presenting itself as a strong unified subject, especially from the point of view of external politics<sup>7</sup>. One proof of this, amongst others, is the same *approach* which led to the "Giscard project". The Convention which brought it to life was established by the European Council (the Union's central organism, consisting of representatives of the various national governments) in its Laeken session (December 2001), and it will be examined and possibly ratified by the intergovernmental conference on October 4th 2003. Furthermore, and this is a very important issue from the constitutional point of view, the same possible revision of the constitution is to be carried out by the Council. Thus, during none of the decisive moments in the process of the formation of the European constitution is the intervention of the *demos* (people) planned. Above all, there is no constitutional assembly planned that is directly elected by the European citizens: Therefore, even a possible referendum, as an ultimate form of approval of the constitution, would at present only appear as a plebiscitary instrument and not as genuinely democratic.

The *democracy deficit* which so many observe (not just from social movements and some leftist parties) and attribute to the European Union, therefore dooms the same constitutional paper in its procedural foundations right from the start. This deficit continues with the confirmation of the complete submission of the European Parliament to the executive: the constitution project clearly provides that the Council of Ministers should be the fundamental legislative body (see article I, 23). This Council is not responsible to parliament, which has only a co-decision function in the legislative process and has no real autonomous power.

The democracy deficit is therefore confirmed in two ways. On the one hand there is the supreme body, the Intergovernmental Council. It is the expression of governments which only and exclusively represent the majority of the electorate of each single state (and not the whole electoral body, as in the case of parliament). The members are elected with a mandate concerning interior politics and not European politics. On the other hand, this supreme body is simultaneously an executive and legislative body, deprived of counterweights and controls (the *checks and balances* appreciated by liberal constitutionalism); a circumstance which contradicts the fundamental principle of separation of powers<sup>8</sup>.

Considering, then, the fundamental values which underlie the Constitutional project, the difference from constitutions resulting from World War II is apparent straight away. *Peace* and *Labour*, values seen as fundamental by European constitutionalists as a reaction to the slaughter of 1939-1945, and as an expression of a dynamic compromise between different social classes, are subjugated to a strong change which adapts these two principles to the current phase of capitalism, based on permanent war and more precarious labour. Peace is no longer considered a fundamental value, but only a possible objective of the Union (I, 2), an objective subjected to opportunism and the political choices of those who make decisions. Peace, therefore, is no longer a constraint which limits the choices of those who make decisions, but only an auspice which is not furnished by any conscious review (and this issue is even worse considering that a real European public space has emerged for the first time precisely in the peace movements of 2003 - thus the constitution contradicts the only large collective uprising of European citizens). Likewise the *right to work*, a central point in European politics in the years running up to 1980 approximately, is converted, in the era of neo-liberal globalisation, into the *right to be working*: it is therefore no longer a universal right but a mere capability of the individual. Therefore there is no longer a policy of full employment but a

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<sup>7</sup> Hartmud Marhold, "Grandeur et faiblesses de la Convention européenne: un bilan provisoire", in *L'Europe en formation*, no. 3-4, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Laurent Pech, "La solution au déficit démocratique: une nouvelle gouvernance pour l'Union européenne?", in *Journal of European Integration – Revue d'intégration européenne*, no.2, June 2003.

simple striving for an "elevated" level of employment, and the Union is only concerned with favouring the sale of workforce acting in the sphere of education, and the removal of obstacles to employment for the single individual (obstacles which are, as we know, nowadays nearly always identified by the excessive rigidity of salaries and norms). "By consequence - as has been noted - the right to work will shift its field of pressure to the labour market, and the weakening of protection will co-exist with the redistribution of the fiscal burden to the advantage of the middle and higher classes"<sup>9</sup>.

However, the treatment the right to work is subject to is only one aspect of much greater importance. In a constitution which, in contrast to the fundamental ideas of modern constitutionalism, does not practically define any limit of action of the governments and is practically open to all demands resulting from estimations of political opportunities, the only constraint which is really defined in a clear mode is *neo-liberal monetarism*. The general philosophy referred to above, which inspired the Maastricht criteria and the stability pact, practically turns into a *constitutional norm*. The articles 66, 67, 68, 73, and 74 of part III of the Constitution project assume price stability, market economy, free competition, budget constraints, and the fight against inflation as principles of the Union. The re-activation of even a moderate Keynesianism becomes juristically impossible within the Union. Under such conditions, we can only hope that the autonomy of politics in relation to the constitutional principles, vaguely presented in the "Giscard project", induces any state or group of states to liberally interpret these constraints and evade the constitutional norm. But there is worse to come: even the dismantling of public services is assuming constitutional range: following a rigorous subsidiary principle, all basic public services have now to be confirmed, primarily, by the market. The "public hand" is left only with the services granted to the poorest citizens, according to the concept of *residual welfare*, which completely redirects the provisions of the welfare state away from the original concept of guaranteeing the basic rights of *all* citizens.

There would be much more to say, for instance regarding the minimal norms which fix the guarantees of the workers by means of trade union representation, dismissal, social security and protection, migration. It is planned that the Ministerial Council should proceed to unanimity on deciding these norms. Hence it would be sufficient for one convinced liberalist (and there may be more of them on the moderate left than the right) to oppose any norm which largely protects work, for this norm to be rejected.

In short, the institutional form of the European Union seems to be purposely made to disillusion the most convinced supporters of a federal Europe, whether they are the most attentive critics of the anti-democratic evolution of Western states, or those who saw Europe as a possible dam against neo-liberal politics, if not practically a base for the reversal of the fundamental tendencies of globalisation. The hope of those, like some currents of the anti-globalisation movement, who see this "state which is no state" which Europe is, also seems unreasoned, since Europe is deprived of a proper structure which is truly autonomous of other nations, deprived of a citizenship which absorbs and substitutes the others, deprived of an exterior policy which is not determined by the compromise between the individual governments, and deprived of space to insert the activities of the movements. In reality it seems safe to say that this state *sui generis* does not contain any positive characteristics of the state (popular legitimacy, separation of powers, re-distributive function, universality of rights). However, it contains all the negative aspects that the state has acquired and aggravated in the era of neo-liberalism: independence of executives and bureaucracies, re-distributive functions to the advantage of the ruling classes and not the popular classes, and closure of borders to migrants. Therefore it seems to be difficult to insert some objectives of the movement into this institutional equilibrium, even precariously, in relation to peace, the fight against insecure employment, and the reception of migrants.

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<sup>9</sup> Mario Agostinelli, "Principi di carta, leggi bronzee", in *la rivista del Manifesto*, no. 42, September 2003.

#### 4. Disillusioned Hopes: "Political" Europe

The limits of Europe's constitutional architecture reflect the limits of Europe as a political subject, i.e. as an entity capable of speaking - at least through the necessary mediations - as a single voice, and of acting as an efficient subject both within as well as outside its borders. In reality, the efficiency of the European Unions' actions within its borders seems significant. The creation of a single currency and the discipline imposed on the economic policies of the various states, the distribution of agricultural subsidies, the diffusion of structural funds and some forms of police coordination are all results of notable importance. However, these results are not considered, internally, to be sufficient to create a really convergent entity based on common identifiable values. Economic efficiency, competitive *performance*, "security" confronting immigration: These can be considered as values based solely on a social science completely subjected to economic forces. And all these factors appear even less unifying as soon as, as is happening today, a crisis becomes evident. Under these conditions, not only is the economic policy of the European Union open to debate, but the existence of the Union as a whole, considering that until now the Union has only basically been legitimised by public interest criteria. Thus Europe's political existence will be threatened from within, and this precisely in a moment when a Union which is not based on monetary principles could show all its true common weal and truly legitimise itself for the actual citizens. Under the current conditions, liberal Europe risks undermining the actual foundations of its own existence. The strong rise of the right in the old continent, the tendency to escape the crisis with nationalism rather than with the launch of a true supranational subject are only some of the symptoms of this difficult situation.

However, it is mainly due to external politics that Europe experiences really strong difficulties in being an autonomous and significant subject.

It can be said, at least until the second war in Iraq, that European politics did not deviate completely from the principle lines of US politics, thus showing an incapability of being able to understand all consequences of the *direction* of US strategy. A strategy driven to fight Serbia yesterday, Iraq today, Iran tomorrow, and always with the final aim of creating geopolitical conditions which prevent either Europe, Russia or China from becoming a political-economic power to an extent which could efficiently confront US power. A strategy which, amongst other things, is never hidden and can easily be documented by all the declarations of intent often raised by the *establishment* in North America<sup>10</sup>. It is obviously impossible that the European leaders are unaware of this strategy. With the exception of European governments which are candidates for the role of a permanent vassal of the US (like the Blair and Berlusconi administrations), it is clear that the others have chosen to support the line of the White House in the name of immediate economic and political interests, sacrificing long-term interests. The first war against Iraq could have had the aim of trying to gain an influence over oil supplies. The war against Serbia was obviously motivated (beyond the "humanitarian" pretext which could only fool those who wanted to be deceived) by the claim to ultimately unravel former Yugoslavia in order to increase the "Mark area" and increase German political influence towards the East. Generally speaking, the interconnection of the different capital fractions on the two sides of the Atlantic, and the mutual interests in economic development of both poles of the relationship (US and European Union) prevent the acknowledgement - *up to a certain point* - of the potential and real conflict between two social-economic systems which still remain distinct and competitive. This "point" was momentarily overcome during the second war in Iraq. In this case it was clear that the US choice (and the insistence on disregarding the UN position) meant that the US wanted to be free to make whichever decision of war it chose in the present and future, intervening at will in any geopolitical conjuncture with essentially only US interests in mind. The

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<sup>10</sup> Federico Bordonaro, "Gli artigli dell'aquila. Gli Stati Uniti e il resto del mondo in un'epoca di crisi", being published by the review *Koinè*, Autumn 2003

war in Iraq, in particular, evoked opposition from France, Germany and Russia because of the situation of permanent occupation it meant, the stable control of the country's oil it secured for the US, the fact that it established a wedge in the flank of Russia and an outpost for a possible war on Iran. However, this opposition, the first sign of rupture in the system of alliances arising from World War II and developing after the collapse of the USSR, has so far only served to make a problem apparent without providing the instruments to solve it. Russia quickly left the axis of Paris and Berlin, and the two European capitals soon found themselves substantially isolated in relation to the other capitals of the Union, all - some more, some less - lined up in support of the US. Therefore, *the first sign of European autonomy was also the sign of a possible rupture of the European Union*: once again, a political decision of high importance was not taken by the Union, but by single states, even if they are states of great power within the Union. The White House still uses this isolation today. The sectors of the establishment in the US which no longer think that *political* unity in Europe is useful for the US are increasing. They prefer the old continent to remain as it is, a vast zone open as much as possible to free exchange. Certainly, a similar concession is at the moment only clearly expressed by the ultraconservative wing in the US, but we know how influential this wing is in the Bush administration. Meanwhile, the following taxi joke is a symptom of the humour of quite a few Americans: *After Iraq, Chirac*.

The contradiction, of course, has not been healed, and will reappear. However, it is not easy to estimate the short or medium-term formation of a common European approach in contrast to that of the US, and this has at least two causes. First of all, the same Franco-German axis is not quite stable and secure, due to persisting differences on the Union's agricultural policies, on the extent and use of the structural funds, on the strictness of the budget (more important for Germany than for France), and on the relevance of the votes in the Council<sup>11</sup>. Secondly, and this is more important, the next (2004) EU enlargement to include Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta is likely to aggravate the disintegration of Europe in matters of external politics under these conditions. These states, above all Poland, which were former satellites of the Soviet Empire, show a sharp tendency towards allying with the US, a tendency which made some commentators ask: "Are we enlarging Europe or the US?"<sup>12</sup>. The motives of these alliances are evident: on the one hand, in choosing the US, the former members of the Warsaw Pact are trying to escape the geopolitical blackmail that has always seen them dependent on fluctuating events in the relations between Germany and Russia; on the other hand, with the necessity of finding a military defence in view of unpredictable developments in Russia, these countries choose to align themselves with those who can guarantee this defence. This also leads to the adhesion to Nato and the subsequent strong imbalance of the Atlantic alliance in favour of the US<sup>13</sup>.

Now, the event of the EU enlargement towards the East, strongly pushed by Germany, clearly shows that the immediate economic objective (enlargement of the European market and of the sphere of influence of German industry) was considered more important than its possible political consequences. Therefore, the existence of Europe as an autonomous political subject is obviously only considered a valid objective as long as it immediately serves the economic interests of the countries concerned. Once again, the construction of Europe appears to have moved more by economic intentions than political ones. The enlargement of the Union renders autonomous external policy even more difficult, as does adding some states to the European community that have little inclination to cede their own authority to supranational bodies, due to past experiences of

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<sup>11</sup> Robin Hagelberg, "L'Allemagne, la France et le processus d'élargissement de l'Union Européenne", in *L'Europe en formation*, no. 3-4, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> "Figli di un dio maggiore?", Editoriale in *Limes. Rivista italiana di Geopolitica*, no. 3, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Fromm, "La Germania non trova più i suoi satelliti", *ibidem*.

domination by the USSR. This increases the distance towards the prospect of a Europe capable of being a player in world politics.

## 5. The Moderate Left: Reasons for Transformation

The parties of the moderate left have practically always accepted without hesitation the course taken by the politics of the Union, and therefore they are to a great extent responsible for it, both on the national and international level.

For instance, they showed absolutely no resistance to the US strategy, during the war on Serbia, directly supporting the military operations and contributing towards the creation of the myth of "humanitarian intervention". In some cases, as for example in Italy, they acted in direct contrast to constitutional law which obliges governments to refuse war, evading the obstacle with a trick, that is by defining the intervention in Kosovo not as a "war", but as an "international police operation". Even this, however, has no real juridical equivalent in international law.

The opposition to the second war on Iraq by a large part of the moderate left should certainly be considered as an important phenomenon, which could open a new phase of European politics if it were to be repeated in the face of other US military adventures. However, it is legitimate to ask whether and how much this opposition is based on a strategic choice and an exact understanding of the US strategy, or whether it more likely results from the fact that the majority of the parties of the moderate left, at the beginning of the war, did not have a part to play in government. Therefore they could much more easily adopt the pacifist sentiments expressed by public opinion in such a strong and detailed way. The next question is whether the opposition to war is not primarily opposition to US unilateralism, and whether a future war decided on a multilateral basis could not register a new convergence of the European left with the White House.

However, identification of the moderate European left with the Union's current political course has not only emerged in the face of war; it is also emphatically noticeable with respect to social and institutional decisions. In most cases, the neo-liberal doctrine is approved with conviction: the Italian Massimo D'Alema - leading exponent of the Democratici di Sinistra (Left Democrats) - signed a manifesto together with Tony Blair which describes the politics of *workfare* as being desirable. This means those politics rooted in the Anglo-Saxon conservative culture that are no longer based on state benefits and the acknowledgement of universal worker's rights, and they tend to rely on a reduction of guarantees and of "indirect salaries" (pensions, assistances, etc.) up until the largest possible number of individuals has been "led to work". Under the current conditions on the labour market, this means forcing the workers to accept any working conditions decided upon by the capitalists. Even the constitutional architecture of Europe is not really being discussed or criticized by the moderate left. The current draft of the constitution is sometimes considered "insufficient"; however, there is no criticism of the non-democratic character of the constitution's defining process, and of the structure of the relations between the parliament and the executive. This is why the moderate left is completely integrated into the processes of weakening parliament to the advantage of the government.

Such a situation cannot result from a miscalculation, a misinterpretation of events. We are not facing a left which *does not understand* that the current trajectory of the European Union is contrary to traditional values of the left itself. Rather, we are facing a left that understands perfectly well which direction Europe is taking and *no longer believes* in the traditional values of the left. And this is not the result of betrayal by this or that leading group: it is rather a result of the material processes of formation and selection of the leading groups.

The origin of these processes must be looked for in the transformation of the parties with mass support, which started in the decades after World War II and accelerated after the 80s. There are at least two different kinds of mass parties: the mass party of *integration* and the mass *electoral* party.

The first has the main task of contributing to the formation of the culture of the lower classes and to select, within these classes, leading groups as an alternative to the dominant groups. The second has the function of an electoral machine that supports the election of a leading group whose creation does not occur, or does not necessarily occur, within the party. More recently, following the transformation of the election campaigns (more personalized and increasingly carried out in the television *media*); the mass electoral party has become unwieldy and useless. The efforts of thousands of party members is of less value (or so they think) than the work of one single public relations agency. The electoral mass party is substituted by the "light" party. Its election resources are invested mainly in electoral technologies and not in members. This is also a *labour saving* investment, related to a decrease in political participation and an accentuated social distance between the candidates and the members. Nowadays, the candidates coming from the party itself are selected mainly according to their electoral *appeal* and not their ideological loyalty, their class origin or their connection to experiences of social mobilisations. In a large proportion of the cases, the candidates do not even come from the party anymore; they are chosen from the ranks of public administration, technocrats, and above all entrepreneurs and *managers*. Quite often they are entrepreneurs and managers from consulting agencies, service companies, and the labour market agencies who have a vested interest in *deregulation* and precarious labour. Therefore, the personnel of the left are chosen without giving any attention to their relation to the popular base, and even if not directly fashioned by capitalist entrepreneurs, the left is still formed by individuals whose main mission is to win the elections: a mission which favours a political culture which is only capable of *adapting* to social processes and not *intervening* to transform them.

These are the reasons why the moderate left is completely integrated into the construction of a neo-liberal Europe - or why it is directly, economically, interested in this form of globalisation, or why it is forced, by its own electoral vocation, to always accept the dominant ideology.

In the majority of cases, the loss of identity within the European moderate left is therefore not due to an erroneous sense of reality, to a temporary loss of memory. It is not a purely *ideal* phenomenon but a *social* phenomenon, and therefore it is much more difficult to overcome.

All this does not favour the politics of the radical left parties and of the movements against neo-liberalism; it makes their politics more difficult. In fact, on the one hand it is sometimes impossible to avoid alliances with the moderate left, if you want to oppose a right-wing government or replace it. It is also impossible because a large part of the electoral *constituency* of the left has either not yet understood the transformation of this left in a liberal direction, or because electoral mechanisms in the different states often require alliances. On the other hand, however, "the unity of all the left against the right" is not an efficient slogan in the medium and long term because leftist governments have often paved the way for the success of right wing governments.

In fact, the reversal of the European political cycle has seen nearly all kinds of centre-right formations follow centre-left or left formations *tout court*. To a large extent this is a result of the neo-liberal policies of the left which, by eroding or dismantling the *welfare state* and the same idea of public intervention into the economy, separated the material base of followers from the lower classes to democracy<sup>14</sup>. This favoured the deterioration of a democracy with strong social content (such as it was in the decades after World War II in Europe), towards a democracy of a liberal type, in which the popular classes keep voting less or follow the "political entrepreneurs" who are more able to respond, in a symbolical way, to the anxiety and the insecurities produced by the collapse of social security systems: i.e. the right.

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<sup>14</sup> Luigi Vinci, *I bivi dell'Europa*, intervention at the seminar of the Associazione Culturale Punto Rosso on the European Constitution, Milan, 27<sup>th</sup> Sept. 03

## 6. Opportunity and Problems of the Parties of the Radical Left and of the Movements

It would appear that the parties of the radical left face considerable political opportunities today.

- The devastating effects of capitalist globalisation all over the world and the recession into which the same economies of the major countries have entered render the search for an alternative way to capitalism legitimate. Contemporarily, the definite defeat of state socialism frees intellectual and political energies and assent for the final realisation of a non-bureaucratic and non-authoritarian socialism.
- The political approaches of the moderate left and its progressive identification with neo-liberal ideology have for the first time allowed them to compete efficiently for the hegemony over the popular voters available to the radical left.
- The great season of political mobilisation of society (from Seattle to Porto Alegre, from Porto Alegre to Genoa and so forth) has created new partners for consultation who could be the elements of a network for social action in which the parties of the radical left could move with ease, extending their influence beyond the restricted limits they have reached so far.

However, these potentials remain only abstract for now, and there are numerous countertendencies which prevent their realisation.

- In public opinion, a broad mistrust persists towards everything which carries hints of communism in one way or another, so that the consensus, which the radical left parties may achieve for a specific campaign, even if strong, does not translate into a stable electoral consensus.
- With the disappearance or transformation of the large workers' parties – and also of the social-democratic parties - the individuals have lost the capacity for connecting their own class condition to an ideology or to really precise politics. The pool of popular voters loyal to the left with which it is possible to begin to compete with the moderate left is therefore, in reality, rather small. The same radical left electorate is often inconsistent and erratic.
- Furthermore, another important and frightening competitor is moving in on the popular electorate: the right. The right, as we have just seen, manages to catch the mood of social concern with greater ease and much stronger instruments (first and foremost, television). Therefore, the first result of recession is not automatically a shift of voters to the left, but their inclination towards the right.

Furthermore, along with these objective difficulties, there are also numerous problems which derive from the process of formation of the radical left, of its ideology and the organisational forms it has given itself. Quite often it is these subjective difficulties which prevent the political opportunities from being seized in time, and it is the overcoming of these difficulties which constitute the precondition for efficient action by the parties we are considering here.

Let's analyze this problem more closely. Speaking of the governing European classes, and of the same moderate European left, we can speak of a quite unified subject because it is convergent in its choice of neo-liberal policies. The only difference lies in the major or minor violence in the application of these policies. The same cannot be said of the radical left parties: and this may be the first big problem of these same parties.

In fact, each one of these parties either has a history which is quite distinct from the others or is the fruit of encounters between different experiences which are not yet balanced between each other. Among the parties of the radical left, there are historical experiences and cultural sensitivities which are very heterogeneous. Some parties are the result of the transformation of communist parties

which held power in this or that state of the "socialist" block, some are the outcome of the transformation and frictions in western communist parties, and still others are the result of the merger between ex-communists and the social-democratic or green left, and some are preserving the experience of the new left in the 70s and the pacifist movement in the following decade. Quite often, each of these parties maintains all these various orientations internally, to greater or less degrees. The reason for the encounter between these different cultural and political components can be found in the severe crisis of the left and the clear choice made by the moderate left for the neo-liberal field. These factors have forced all anti-capitalist groups to look for a convergence terrain and to try and produce new cultural politics.

Up until now, convergence and political innovation do not seem to have brought the hoped-for gains. The parties we are examining are in fact still profoundly divided, even within the GUE alliance, and this division is noticeable, first of all, in the differing standpoints towards the European Union. In fact, not all are convinced of the necessity of a strong Union and many prefer to give priority to a struggle on the national front, without putting together the effort necessary for constructing common action at the European level. The substantial silence on the processes of formation and on the contents of the European constitution is the most visible symptom of this lack of common initiative and of the divergence of opinions about the importance of the Union itself.

As in the case of the moderate left, a large part of the orientation of ideas of the radical left can also be explained by material processes, relative to the status of the political parties in their political system. In the majority of cases, the parties traditionally understand working for socialism as an action essentially carried out at the state level, and in nearly all cases this opinion has been reinforced and is now part of the inherent identity of many parties, because their creation or their differentiation from the moderate left is actually based on the idea of protecting or developing the social state. However, the social state, in the concrete historical experience, is the nation state, whereas the construction of Europe with its contemporary loss of some of the competence of the nation states is identified by the weakening and dismantling of welfare. This explains the mistrust of many parties towards the European Union: mistrust which could only be overcome if these parties - and their social base - were to understand that the weakening of the nation state is not caused by the European Union but by neo-liberal globalisation, and a strengthening of the Union could (in political conditions other than the current conditions) be the only efficient barrier to neo-liberalism or even produce a restitution of some state benefits, this time redistributed among national bodies, supranational and regional bodies.

Another very important material cause of the cultural mistrust towards the European Union is the political inefficiency of the location where the radical left parties mainly succeed in expressing their presence, i.e. the European Parliament. We have already seen how the European Parliament is a body with very little power compared to the Council or the Inter-governmental Conference. The initiatives undertaken at the parliamentary level alone are practically always symbolic gestures, and their immediate efficiency is very doubtful. Furthermore, the weakening of the parliaments compared to the governments is now a very broad and irreversible phenomenon and concerns all the nation states as well: therefore, the mistrust towards the European Parliament would coherently have to be extended to the mistrust towards parliamentary action in general. If instead we rightly maintain that the role of parliaments should be protected and strengthened, a common and coherent struggle would need to be fought on both the national and European level. It is not the European Parliament which is taking power from the nation states and thus weakening the possibilities for welfare politics. It is the national governments and the European Council which are weakening parliamentary democracy so that they are more able to enforce unpopular neo-liberal politics. Only within the European dimension would a new democracy, which would also focus on reactivating the role of parliament, be able to master the instruments of political economy capable of reconstructing the material foundations of democracy itself.

However, as we have said in the beginning, all this represents a powerful contradiction: the extended and re-distributive policies, environmental and pacifist policies sought by the radical left can only be developed within the European framework; on the other hand, however, these politics cannot be developed within the current European framework, the way it is being shaped at the moment. How can we escape this contradiction?

A partial response could perhaps come from the experience of the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC, Communist Refoundation Party), which has tried innovative ways, in Italy and in Europe, to develop anti-capitalist politics.

Perhaps also due to the strong European characteristic of the entire Italian political culture, the PRC realised immediately that the initiatives of the forces antagonistic to capitalism, within the massive tremor produced by globalisation, could only move efficiently on a continental scale. This intuition was not just formal, it was not just reduced to a few phrases in congress texts, and it conditioned the whole of PRC politics at its most important turning points. For instance, the support given by the PRC to the centre-left government led by Romano Prodi and the subsequent rupture with this government can also be explained in relation to the construction dynamics of the European Union. Up until the introduction of the single currency, the PRC accepted a series of restrictive policies, with huge efforts and great internal tensions, aimed at creating the conditions necessary for Italy to immediately participate in the Euro area. Hence the party treated the entry to European space as an objective which at least up to a certain point, justified the sacrifice of other actual objectives of the party. However, immediately after achieving this objective, the PRC made a request to start a new political phase, whereby the entry to Europe should signify the initiation of a relaunch of neo-Keynesian policies at the national and continental level. Having failed to receive any positive response to this demand, the PRC withdrew its support for the Prodi administration and started a strong polemic with the forces of the centre and the moderate left. This polemic became even more acute during the war against Serbia. This did not mean abandoning the European perspective, however, but the effort of finding other ways for the construction of a "Europe united in solidarity". These ways were first attempted with the action within the GUE and then, much more importantly, from 2000 onwards, with the opening towards the social movements, which started to strongly contest the decisions of all the supranational bodies. This meant immediate confrontation with the new form assumed by contemporary political power, which is no longer situated merely in the nation state but in the confluence of multiple decisional levels. Based also on this new, rich relation with the movements, the PRC again proposed actions on the European level and the formation of a new political subject, capable of bringing the best experiences from parties and movements together and to work, on this basis, towards constructing an alternative Europe<sup>15</sup>.

The evolution of the PRC allowed this party to regain an important role in Italian politics, although it experienced the huge difficulties common to all the parties of the radical left. This evolution could perhaps show that it is possible to be European without being neo-liberal, and how it could be possible to try to redesign a political space capable of redistributing income and guaranteeing rights without retreating to the national level.

Therefore, the way out of the contradiction we have claimed above consists of opening towards all the social movements which are also facing the problem of the construction of modern Europe today. The *impasse* that parliamentary action is in (at the national and European level) could possibly be overcome with the creation of a synergy between the actions of parties and the actions of movements, a synergy which would amplify the privileges of the parliaments and define on a contemporary basis the conditions of a broad social democracy which is not merely limited to representative democracy. We will return to this point.

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<sup>15</sup> Fausto Bertinotti, "Per un nuovo soggetto politico", in *la rivista del Manifesto*, no. 30, July/August 2002

The opening towards the social movements is difficult for many parties of the radical left due to specific situations (absence or relative weakness of the movements at the national level) or due to ideological barriers which consist of the idea of the political party still being the main instrument, or even the only instrument, of the struggle of the lower classes. Even if the weakness of the movements at the national level can be evaded with the reference to the global movement, overcoming the ideological barriers is much more difficult. In fact, many parties of the radical left were founded in recent years or established their existence, on the basis of two prerequisites: 1) the reference to the state as an instrument of social emancipation and 2) envisioning the party as a basic guarantee of political and ideological autonomy of the lower classes. As the reference to the state makes it difficult for these parties to accept the autonomy of the multiple associations in which society organises itself, the reference to the party (and its central function) prevents them from understanding what the political role of those associations and movements is today. The cultural renewal of the radical left would require the acquisition of the idea that the "public space" is not just simply a state space. However, this renewal is only rendered really effective when accompanied by the comprehension of the fact that the radical left itself has to elaborate *a new model of a party* if it still wants to be able to enter into a dialogue with society. This is not a question of adhering to the model of a "light" party but of giving up the idea of the traditional party incorporating the masses for the *connective* mass party.

Whereas the traditional party with mass support tended to encompass all forms of social and political action carried out by the lower classes and left the other associations (and sometimes even the trade unions) with only a secondary function, a new connective mass support party would have to acknowledge that it is now *impossible* to unify all social action in one political agenda and it would definitely have to prove itself to be a body capable of connecting different forms of action and various associations of society which are and remain autonomous from the party. In some cases these associations could even assume the guidance for the whole movement. The characteristics which distinguish this party from the other associations is the fact that the party, necessarily, takes care of *all* aspects of the social struggle, while the other bodies are often *single-issue oriented*, as well as the fact that the party *always* looks at the problem of the relation of social struggles to the sphere of state power. However, to produce a real cultural change within the radical left and in particular the communist-inspired left it is important to understand that the function of the relations between the various forms of struggle, or even between these forms of struggle and the state, could actually be changed, in certain cycles, by associations or networks of associations that are other than the party, even if the party - more than the others - is the body which has to learn how to change this function.

This transformation of the traditional concept of the political party is probably an essential condition for the development as well as for the survival of the parties of the radical left. In fact, if it is true that these parties seem more frequently to represent a constant orientation of the electorate - even if it is a minority - then they would seem to be carrying out a precise social function of organising dissent. This is the acute and dangerous signal of a retreat to national realities which is quite important (like Germany and France - the latter especially with regard to the PCF). It shows that there is no guarantee that a part of the electorate will continue to identify with the radical left as well as to its actual stable political representation. An analysis of the social base of the voters and the members of the parties would quite probably also reveal the strong presence of social figures linked to the preceding cycle of class struggle, and a relative presence of little importance to the social figures who express themselves in the new movements today and indicate the future composition of the lower classes. Only a party which stops claiming to be the only legitimate political subject can hope to cover the needs and aspirations of a new generation of members who are used to individual autonomy, critical analysis, and the multiplicity of forms of struggle and places of debate.

Finally, and returning directly to our theme, only a connective party can present the model for unitary action at the European level, action which needs to precisely interconnect very diverse realities: parties with different histories, movements, associations and trade unions.

In summary: *political dialogue between the radical parties, acknowledgement of the importance of the European Union, a new interpretation of the role of the state and, within the state, of parliament, strong renewal of the party and an opening towards the various social movements.* These are the initial conditions needed for the action of the radical left in Europe to become efficient. If these conditions are not realised, it is easy to foresee that the parties of the radical left will lose any effective influence on European politics, and therefore on the politics of the individual nations. And, so, the ruling classes would lose an uncomfortable adversary, and the movements would lose a potential partner.

Furthermore, the movements would really need a recognised partner capable of remaining simultaneously within the institutions (national and supranational) and society. Not because the movements do not have a political dimension, as the *establishment* of the ruling classes (the moderate left included), as well as the leaders of the radical left, keep repeating, but for a more subtle reason which is not immediately obvious.

In reality, the current movement does not need any party to teach it what politics are, or to translate the "harmless" demands and needs of the movement itself. On the contrary, the so-called "non global" movement is instead a completely political movement. Not only because it confronts some social problems which the parties do not know how to address or cannot address (for example the relationship between science and the accumulation of capital, forms of sexist domination, the possibilities for ecological conversion of production, etc.) across its numerous and differentiated components. They deal with issues of political power which are much more in depth and more important than the usual questions dealt with in parliament. This also shows the ability to assign the necessary importance to those events which are, again, the really decisive ones. For example, no party from the moderate left, and not even a group of parties from the radical left, has thought of placing the problem of the European constitution on their agenda. Or, if they thought of it, they did not do so with the necessary efficiency and importance. Only the movement has tried to take initiatives which keep pace with today's current struggles and attempted to discuss the general prerequisites and particular contents of the draft European constitution, both with respect to the demonstration in Rome during the Inter-governmental Conference on October 4<sup>th</sup>, and, above all, the call for the Second European Social Forum in Saint Denis.

Therefore, the limits of the movement are not entirely due to its claimed "non-political" character. It is more likely to risk action rich in political *intentions* but incapable of political *effects*, either because of the lack of institutional partners or because of the possible loss of associations participating in the movement to structures of support for the European institutional project.

In fact, as Laurent Pech<sup>16</sup> observed, together with the clear democratic deficit registered within the European institutions, there is primarily a consistent lack of responsibility of the Council towards parliament and therefore insufficient separation of powers. One component of the European leaders is trying to respond through increasing public and private agencies which are also involved in concrete *governance*. This control of the governments, which is no longer carried out by any institutional body, will be carried out, during the concrete procedures of *governance*, mainly by civil society associations (experts in associations specialised in the various sectors involved in administrative duties). They will participate in the formulation of decisions and in verifying whether they have been carried out. In this way, a "participatory democracy" could be realised which would substitute the old legitimacy controls provided by the representative democracy, with new concrete

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<sup>16</sup> Laurent Pech, *op.cit.*

controls of efficiency and transparency made possible by a pluralist *governance*. We can note straight away that, on the one hand, that this type of extension of democracy to the mechanisms which guide the concrete predisposition and realisation of norms can easily be adequate to the modalities of existence for a modern power which is increasingly less often to be found in parliament and more often in administration<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, as Pech himself says, we also do not know who has legitimised the action of these associations which are included in the *governance*: who has chosen them, who is controlling them, who is going to revoke their choice, if necessary? One task is to integrate representative democracy with participatory democracy, and the other task is to provide for the strengthening of the latter and restriction of the former.

Nevertheless, beyond the value judgements which could be made for this project of *governance*, the fact remains that these projects exist, are quite concrete and are already being effected in various situations all over the world. These are a reality, a reality for which it is said that in the concrete process of government, the associations of civil society (which often constitute the profound structure of the movement against neo-liberalism) *tend to become more important than the parties*, and these associations also *tend to be co-opted by the leading classes* as has happened to the parties in the past, and are then reduced to simple functional appendices of power.

It is surely true that the movement against neo-liberalism has a political impact today which prevents a lot of its associations from being co-opted by the governing classes. However, for the independence of the movement to become sustainable, it is necessary for the movement to equip itself with "institutional mechanisms" which are capable of reinforcing its own independence. The associations of the movement must neither act as simple *lobbies* (because they would be subjugated to political power in any case) nor as political parties (because they would lose their originality). They would have to breathe life into "etats generaux" capable of formulating clear political strategies and thus committing the political parties to transparent and responsible action. On the other hand, the parties could participate in writing analyses and furnishing the actions of the movements with the support of a legitimacy in terms of political representation which would add to the uncertain "participatory" legitimacy.

On the whole: a synergy between parties and movements, between two distinct forms of political action, both of them useful and necessary, is necessary to enable the formation of an alternative direction in the construction of Europe to be initiated on a national and supranational level.

Without this synergy, nobody would have the force or legitimacy to reverse the march of neo-liberal Europe.

## **7. Alternatives for the Parties and the Movements**

In conclusion, it seems sensible to indicate, more or less briefly, which some of the most important alternatives are - with respect to the European Union - from which the parties and movements would need to choose.

- Is it really important to commit oneself to political action at the European level? Or is it more important to develop an action at the national level? The movements have already answered by indicating that the supranational level is decisive for the struggle. As far as this point is concerned, the parties are still undecided. However, it is true that action on the national level is inevitable, and that current politics present themselves as action which is carried out on several levels. Thus, it is also true that the culture of many parties of the radical left needs a change which will force these parties to really give the European dimension the importance it deserves.

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<sup>17</sup> Mi sia concesso di rinviare, su questo punto, al mio *Nella corrente. Mutamenti dell'azione politica*, Milano, Punto Rosso, 1994.

- If there is agreement on the necessity for a strong European political subject, it is appropriate to fight for this subject to assume the form of a federation. Perhaps it would be more realistic and efficient to aim at a more flexible form of union enabling Europe to play an independent role of political action? A federation would certainly be the optimal form; but the current state of the Union and the predictable effects of its upcoming enlargement are going to make the federal solution less immediate. Furthermore, it may be necessary to have an “apprenticeship” phase for all European citizens, and the federal solution could be premature and produce a reaction of rejection<sup>18</sup>.
- Must the independence of the European Union from the USA also be realised as a military independence? Is it necessary to have an efficient and powerful European army? This is perhaps one of the most difficult points of discussion within the parties and movements. The advocates of rearming Europe would need to explain how this could be reconciled with pacifist values and the politics of defence and the development of the *welfare state*. The opponents of armament would need to explain how it would realistically be possible to challenge US supremacy by other means. Maybe an intermediate solution would be to develop a strong and broad network of popular non-violent defence, integrated into a relatively small army. However, is this a realistic solution?
- What should be the reciprocal relationship between parties and movements of the radical left? Is it possible to create a real synergy or is it more realistic for the moment to initiate processes of reciprocal acknowledgement with a perspective of a future co-operation of action?
- What relationship should be maintained with the parties of the European moderate left? A clear distinction, a tactical alliance, a strategic alliance? The first and last answer appear to be insufficiently flexible: The first assumes that the moderate left is a monolithic block which is now completely unrecoverable for politics of a popular character; the third assumes that this left is still really left and not completely identified with neo-liberal logic. The intermediary answer is perhaps the solution which guarantees maintaining a relationship with the electoral base of the moderate left, and also preserves the independence of the radical left, as well as the possibility of pressuring the moderate left into clarifying its contradictions. In each case it is noteworthy that the problem of the relationship with the moderate left not only concerns the parties of the radical left but also the movements. And in fact, the movements are also oscillating between refusing any relationship with the moderate left and *lobby* actions which consider the parties of the social-democratic type as the privileged intermediaries.

The answer to this and other similar problems would require an evaluation of the themes discussed in this contribution: properties and current tendencies of the European construction, the role of the moderate left and the radical left, and the role of the movements. These themes certainly need a thorough in-depth analysis. However, the answer has to be provided soon: if not, Europe will advance without us.

Or, rather, go backwards.

September 2003

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<sup>18</sup> Luigi Vinci, *op.cit.*