

Francesco Rossolillo

Francesco Rossolillo, editor of this journal since 1997, when he succeeded its founder, Mario Albertini, has died. Rossolillo's theoretical contribution to federalism, always accompanied by an active militant stance within the European Federalist Movement and the European Union of Federalists (which he served as president for a number of years) is reflected particularly in *The Federalist*, which, during its almost 50-year history, has contained many of his essays, comments and political documents: writings that are still referred to and whose structural elements continue to be used today.

Francesco Rossolillo always placed great store by the origination of culture, convinced that the political and organizational autonomy of the federalist movement is founded on the cultural autonomy of its members. Autonomy on all fronts, he believed, is the condition that allows federalists to play to the full their role as groundbreakers and sowers of the seeds of change.

“The only motivation — he wrote in an editorial published in *The Federalist Debate* —, in the absence of power and money, that can prompt a militant to persevere, sometimes for decades, in what is often a thankless and difficult endeavour, is the awareness of our indispensable historical role: the awareness that we are the ones who are mapping out a new way forward, who have a perspective that allows us to understand the meaning of the changes taking place, changes that the schemes of traditional ideologies no longer allow us to interpret. It is an eminently cultural awareness. Hence, ... politics and culture are two inseparable aspects of the federalist's work. This means that *it is up to federalists themselves to develop their culture.*”

This indicated neither presumption nor isolation. Culture always means reciprocal exchange, and “conservation” is always an element of the development, in revolutionary times, of a new culture. According to Rossolillo, “simple negation is not part of the attitude of the true revolutionary who, to use Hegel's terminology, rejects not the reality he fights, but rather the partiality of that reality. He seeks not to suppress it,

but rather to overcome it, incorporating it into a more comprehensive reality. The action of the revolutionary," like the culture he develops, "is thus both negation and conservation." ("Note sulla coscienza rivoluzionaria", in *Il Politico*, 1970, n. 2, p. 329). This is the mechanism that, in political revolutions, allows the Hegelian dialectic overcoming and leads to a breaking free from the categorial structure that underlies normal politics, and to a weakening of the political formula, or "the structure that governs the struggle for power."

For revolutionary groups, therefore, theorizing is a crucial part of their activity, because it is up to them, in pre-revolutionary phases, to shed light where there is darkness and indicate the path that must be followed in order to overcome the difficulties and confusion of a political language that has lost the capacity to reflect and embody the reality of social life.

It is a difficult task, because the "the logic of revolutionary action obliges those who are committed to it not to limit themselves to bringing within sight the alternative to the existing political formula, but to place that alternative in the context of a general view of historical development, and of the ultimate values for whose realization it paves the way. This is because men cannot be mobilized for a long and difficult struggle only in the name of a defined political objective that, precisely because it is defined, negates more values than it realizes, but only in the name of the liberation of mankind's very essence, of the full realization of all values..." (*ibidem*, p. 328).

The relationship between individuals and history is, indeed, the starting point for Francesco Rossolillo's reflections on the realization that motivates the revolutionary's choice. Taking Heidegger's concepts of authentic and inauthentic existence, which the philosopher formulated in an attempt to define the meaning of the life of the individual, Rossolillo, by relating them to the choice of the revolutionary, was able to grasp their limitations: "If the future is the specific temporal dimension of authentic existence, ... to regard the future as circumscribed by the death of the individual is to reduce drastically the scope of man's existence, because only certain projects can be realized within the brief time that is the lifespan of an individual: and these are, typically, projects of the everyday variety...: recreation, pursuit of a career, of wealth, of success..., the projects of inauthentic existence. Thus, the future of authentic existence would seemingly have to be a future of much broader horizons, in which each life's project acquires meaning through its continuation in the projects of lives that follow." Therefore, "the life of an individual becomes meaningful only in the context of history" (*ibidem*, pp. 320-21).

“Only those who live their ideals in a historical perspective can pursue a revolutionary design, because the revolutionary cannot regard the future as that short interval of time that separates an individual’s present from his death.” Those who do not view their life “in terms of historical cycles that can take several generations to complete cannot take the radical step of renouncing all prospects of immediate success — a step, associated with the need to turn one’s back on normal politics, that any struggle to change the existing paradigm demands.” (*ibidem*, p. 327).

In the same way, an authentic revolutionary stance cannot be assumed by anyone who does not submit to the “stern call of reason, which defines the full realization of values as just a governing criterion..., corresponding to the idea of the reason of the final stage of historical development, and the political objective of revolutionary action as just a step, imperfect and partial, along the road towards this full realization of values.” (*ibidem*, p. 333).

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To focus, in this profile of Francesco Rossolillo, on a single work would certainly be to fail to reflect the breadth of his many contributions: his essays on sovereignty, on federalism, and on the meaning of the European federation, his historical writings, dealing for example with the United States of America and the origins of fascism, and his editorials for this journal in which he analyzed, from a federalist perspective, the events and problems of our times. Equally, we would fail to do justice to his strategic contribution to the struggle for a European federation, through his adopting of stances, his lectures at congresses and, in the past seven years, his *European Letter*, in which, at three-monthly intervals, he sent Europe’s politicians brief but incisive political analyses and strategic indications, with the aim of keeping high on the agenda the ideas that it is up to federalists to transmit and politicians to assimilate, in readiness, when the time is right, to put them into practice.

The fact nevertheless remains that one topic very close to his heart — whose importance becomes clearer than ever in times of impasse, when there is a need to face up to new strategic situations — was that of the role of the federalist, and thus the role of the revolutionary: this was indeed the topic of an essay on which he was working when he became too weak to continue. We have decided to publish this essay in this issue of the journal — together with a note he had just completed and, as originally planned, a text from thirty years ago — despite being fully aware that he had only just begun his customary rigorous and punctilious revision of the draft.

The Federalist

The Revolutionary*

FRANCESCO ROSSOLILLO

1. *Flows and Structures in History.*

The historical process is a process of change: differentiated change with different rhythms, that consists, on the one hand, of complex and continuous transformations and, on the other, of periods of equilibrium in which there emerge, on the contrary, not so much the *flows* as the *structures* of the historical-social reality, in other words, the bonds between its elements that show a degree (more or less profound) of persistence and interrelationship. For this reason, any attempt to understand the nature of the historical process must be based on both a diachronic approach, which evaluates its evolution, and a synchronic approach, which investigates the static aspect of the structures. The fact clearly remains that the artificial separation of these two aspects is arbitrary, and that each remains indissolubly linked to the other. But it is equally clear that the study of history cannot ignore (notwithstanding the more or less arbitrary differentiation of these two aspects) approaches that highlight the persistence, sometimes protracted over a long time, of the same behaviours, of the same institutions, or of both. In this regard, we might cite the division of history into periods, the identification of homogeneous areas of civilization, Max Weber's formulation of ideal types, and even the organization of the language used to describe historical transformations, which, in the final analysis, does nothing other than reflect the transition from one structure to the next structure. These approaches identify those elements that, within the flow, remain the same and constitute its subject. And this subject, by retaining its own identity in the course of the historical transformation, clarifies the meaning of the

* This is the preliminary draft of an essay that the author was unable to complete. It is published here respecting his general outline. A few changes have been made to the final part which, in places, was still in note form.

change.

If, then, it is true that the actors of the historical process are born, die and evolve, it is also true that each of these actors is linked to all the others and must coordinate, consciously or unconsciously, its conduct with the conduct of each of the others, giving rise, in each historical situation, to a state of *equilibrium*, or a *social system*. Clearly, this represents an element of inertia in the process. These states of equilibrium allow society to function: thanks to them, each individual or institution is able, roughly, to predict (on the basis of its more or less marked recurrence) the behaviour of others, and to mould its own conduct accordingly. They are the foundation of social peace, and thus of civilization itself, which flourishes and develops on the strength of the different and coordinated contributions that each subject is able to make thanks to the fact that society is based on the system's assignation of clearly defined roles to its actors. If, in society, everything were to move with disordered rapidity, preventing any form of equilibrium from becoming established, the result would be total chaos. The order that allows the great values of civil coexistence room for expression is possible thanks to the presence of a relatively rigid delineation of the sphere of freedom within which each of us must, on pain of being relegated to the fringes of society, remain in order to allow the system to work correctly.

2. *Civil Society and the Institutions.*

It may be useful, for analytical purposes, to distinguish between two components of the historical process that, once again, are inextricably linked: civil society and the institutions. It is a distinction that has become increasingly important over the centuries as human societies have become differentiated and more structured and civilization has gradually been refined, but it can be traced right back to the earliest stages in the process of the emancipation of mankind.

Civil society is the ambit of transformation. Civil society is where innovation finds expression, economic activity grows or shrinks, science and technology advance, and art flourishes or declines. Clearly, the impetus for change is inevitably accompanied by the need for order and stability, without which it would be unable to express itself and would degenerate into anarchy. But being, on their own, unable to guarantee sufficiently coordinated action, the spontaneous forces of society cannot fulfil this need and generate the situations of equilibrium that are the indispensable condition for the advancement of civilization. What is

required, for this, is the intervention of determined political will, that is, of power, which expresses itself through the institutions, which are thus the ambit of stability. The institutions, issuing laws and imposing the observance of these laws, even through recourse to force, constitute the specific element of equilibrium and inertia in the social system.

However, it is obvious that no institutional order remains, throughout the course of its existence, fixed. The institutions have the flexibility they need to adapt, up to a certain point, to the changeability of the social dialectic, without sacrificing the interdependence of behaviours that determine their basic physiognomy. But their existence rests on relations of command and obedience. Any adjustment they may make to historical circumstances cannot therefore be allowed to jeopardize the *power situation* of which they are the expression, or the structure of the civil society that underpins and reinforces this power situation. Hence, as long as an institutional system continues (just about) to work, all that history will experience (periods of war excepted) are phases of *slow and ordered movement*, which do not upset the major political and social equilibria.

The history of European integration is a significant example of this process of adaptation. The birth and development of the European institutions resulted from an attempt to adapt to a European framework the institutional order of a number of states whose economies and societies were becoming increasingly interdependent (without, however, sacrificing their national sovereignty and the balance of power linked to their retention of sovereignty). If, then, on the one hand, for the first three decades of their existence, the European institutions were in part the expression of an evolutionary phase of the process (in that they accompanied and favoured a period of great development of the European economy), on the other, and this is particularly clear in the current historical phase, they have been instruments of the attempt — largely unconscious — to postpone the “day of reckoning”, that is, the point at which the basic contradiction, resolvable only through the relinquishing of sovereignty to a European state, will suddenly become patently obvious.

It is to be noted that this whole picture is complicated by the two facets — internal and external — of the political institutions, which on the one hand address civil society, and on the other the political institutions of the other states. Externally, the political institutions do not have the specific function of maintaining social peace and ensuring the rule of law; rather, even though they are interested in the preservation of a degree of international order, they must necessarily subordinate this concern to the

furthering of *their own* power interests, and those of *their own* civil society. Therefore, they are to be examined solely with regard to their internal facet.

3. The Detachment of Civil Society from the Institutions. Phases of Slow Movement and Phases of Rapid Movement. Historical Crises.

Civil society and political institutions are very closely related to each other. Political institutions are always, originally, the expression of civil society, and they reflect the behaviours that manifest themselves within it. Moreover, by allowing these behaviours to evolve in an orderly fashion, they bring out all their positive potentialities. Thus, they not only reflect, but also regulate the often confused and contradictory needs and aspirations that manifest themselves within civil society. In short, these two aspects of society condition each other.

Hence, in the evolutionary phases of history, the action of each of these two components of society strengthens the action of the other: the social system expresses all its creative force and society goes through phases of expansion. But this happens only in the *evolutionary* phases of the social process, because in the long run the rhythm of evolution of civil society does not match that of the evolution of the political institutions, given that civil society is the specific ambit of change (even though there has to be a stable framework for this change to come about) and the institutions are the specific ambit of stability (even though they have to evolve, never losing their identity, in order to adapt to the evolution of civil society). The institutions thus tend, over time, to lose touch with civil society; they tend to lose the capacity to govern its needs and aspirations, and, as a result, they tend to arrest its development, suffocating its progressive impetus, and causing it to degenerate into anarchy and into sterility. It is thus inevitable that the *inflexibility* of the institutions gives rise, over time, to ever-deepening divergences, and ultimately to irremediable contradictions between the degree of evolution reached by civil society and the capacity of the institutions and of the balance of power that they express to reflect and govern these contradictions. These are the phases in which the development of civil society is no longer disciplined and oriented, but *slowed down*, or *arrested*, by the incapacity of the institutions to adapt to it: these are civilization's degenerative phases.

Hence, the phases of slow movement can be broken down into two sub-phases. The first follows the birth of a new institutional order and is characterized by a strong degree of compatibility between the function-

ing of civil society and the functioning of the political institutions. During this sub-phase, politics, science, the economy, culture and civilization generally go through periods of expansion. The second sub-phase (still part of the phase of slow movement) derives from the growing contradiction between the demands of civil society, within which there continue to emerge forces for change, even confused and disordered ones, and the progressive inflexibility of the political institutions, which are unable to respond to these demands.

But this still does not explain the nature of the great changes that are the key turning points in the historical process. The only way to understand this process is as a succession of *states of equilibrium*, in which the transition from one state to the next, following a period of expansion and, subsequently, a long period of standstill due to the inflexibility of the institutions, comes about through unexpected and dramatic *historical crises*, or through *phases of rapid movement*. These are the high points of history in which freedom, taking the place of determinism, bursts onto the scene.

If the institutions are the ambit of stability, then political action, understood in its specific sense, according to the doctrine of political realism, is the ambit in which determinism most properly manifests itself. However, this does not take away the fact that determinism and freedom of human behaviour are inextricably linked: or that each one finds its proper ambit in specific periods in the historical process. Determinism emerges in those long phases in which the laws of political action manifest themselves and govern, albeit with the necessary flexibility, the behaviour of men; freedom, on the other hand, finds its voice in periods of acute crisis in which the laws of politics are momentarily suspended, so to speak, or temporarily lose their validity, making way for freedom and allowing the transition from one power equilibrium to the next.

This structure of the historical process means that, precisely because of the inevitably unexpected nature of the crises, the contradiction between the demands of civil society and the institutional order, until it reaches crisis point, remains virtual and in any case unconscious. Continuity of the institutions, with their inevitable adaptations, means continuity of the way in which the political alternatives open to the citizens are formulated and perceived, continuity of the nature of their expectations and motivations, and of the structure of their careers. The system tends to be self-perpetuating, which indicates that it does not, by itself, produce an alternative to itself.

4. *The Revolution.*

The historical process is thus a *succession of different equilibria*, which means that each system is replaced by a different system, adjusted to meet the needs of civil society, and thus that civil society has the inherent capacity to generate new institutional orders and to re-generate itself. This happens because social systems are not machines, or communities of bees or ants that have rigidly predetermined patterns of behaviour. They are made up of men, whose behaviour is certainly in part determined (by the need to make the ordered functioning of their social system possible), but who do not, for this reason, stop being reasoning beings; they are beings who live determinism through the filter of consciousness and retain a sphere of freedom: even though this consciousness is often a false consciousness and this freedom only virtual. This means, first of all, that if it continues to be true that the system does not by itself produce, in a progressive and conscious way, an alternative to itself, it does, however, leave space for the growth and development, internally, of dissatisfaction with and lack of faith in the existing institutions, these sentiments being manifested both among the political class and in public opinion. And it is precisely the existence of these gaps, this opening up of spaces of virtual freedom, that allows part of the political class, and part of public opinion, when the hiatus between civil society and the institutional order starts to widen, to hear and remember the revolutionary message—even though it limits itself to storing it away in a hidden corner of its consciousness, in readiness to turn it into a conscious project only when the crisis occurs. And it also means that, in these gaps in the system, there have to be able to emerge groups capable of becoming conscious and active bearers of the revolutionary message, capable, that is, of seeing the alternative before the crisis comes, and of preparing for its advent by making all aware of its coming.

In their purest form, these sudden transformations, which occur through crises, are *revolutions*, or transformations wrought by forces of an essentially popular nature existing within the system (even though, clearly, it takes political leaders to interpret and orient this popular momentum). When the popular element is absent, or stirred up surreptitiously, what one is faced with is a coup d' état, always born of a situation of profound political decay, in which the aim is not to institute a new order, but to try and prevent the collapse of the existing one, or to restore an old, now irretrievably discredited order.

When, on the other hand, the forces in the field are entirely, or

partially, external to the system, the situation is one of war. Wars can have the effect of helping to create a new equilibrium within the state, or states, that emerged as losers from the conflict only if there exists within it, or within them, a popular movement that autonomously pushes in the same direction and whose emergence is favoured by the external forces; otherwise, they produce only a strengthening of the pre-existing equilibrium, or quite simply, chaos. It must be noted that the main function of wars is a different one. Indeed, the crises, and successions of equilibria that follow them are characteristic not only of the internal situations of states, but also of systems of states, in which the perception that governments, politicians, observers and ordinary citizens have of power relations reflects a superseded distribution of the effective resources that form the basis of power. This incorrect perception prevents the new virtual power system (now fully mature) from evolving into a situation of real power, thereby neutralizing the energies of ascending states and setting those that are on the wane before challenges to which they are unequal. Hence the systems of states are rendered unstable and incapable of promoting general development. Wars serve to overcome this contradiction. We might cite the example of the transition from the European to the world equilibrium that was sanctioned by the Second World War, which put an end to the state of uncertainty created in the wake of World War I.

Returning, in particular, to the institutional order of the European societies, it must be recalled that whereas, as a *regime*, it has undergone numerous transformations, starting with the French Revolution, as a *community*, it has remained substantially stable, that is to say, the extent of civil coexistence (leaving aside the processes of German and Italian unification) has remained practically unchanged throughout the various regime changes. It is precisely this community aspect, which has a much more radical bearing on civil coexistence than the structure of the institutions (through the regime) does, together with the sovereignty of the nation-state, that the objective of Europe's political unification, that is of the foundation of a European federal state, throws into question. It thus brings within sight a profound revolutionary transformation.

5. *The Mole.*

To try to understand, in more depth, the meaning of historical transformations, it is worth returning briefly to the question of the systemic nature of the equilibria. In particular, it is worth underlining the

fact that the equilibria comprise roles, or functions, differently exercised, assigned to the institutions, groups and individuals that make up the system. Thus, systems understood in their entirety, on the one hand, and individual roles on the other, are two sides of the same coin. The system defines and assigns the roles and coordinates their functions. The roles, interacting with one another, support the system, serve it a purpose, and help to render it permanent.

It therefore needs to be underlined that it is the relative rigidity of the equilibria that determines the suddenness of their transformations. Clearly, this does not mean that transformations are not always preceded by preparatory phases, sometimes complex ones. It means that in these phases, the movement of civil society remains in part disordered, in part virtual, and in part unconscious; society, in fact, does not evolve in the phases of movement: or rather, it evolves only below the surface. This is precisely why Hegel and Marx, in reference to these phases of historical transformation, use the mysterious and impersonal image of the *mole*, which, unseen, digs tunnels under the halls of power, destroying their foundations and eventually causing the whole edifice suddenly to collapse in on itself. It goes without saying that signs of the approaching transformation accumulate as time goes by. They take the form of splits and contradictions, they undermine the efficiency of the social system, they reduce the close compatibility of the roles of which it is composed, and they reduce the moral engagement of its protagonists. But they are nothing more than signs and presentiments. They indicate the presence of a pre-revolutionary situation, certainly a necessary condition for the revolution proper, but not a sufficient condition: in the absence of the detonator, they can often fizzle out into nothing. The political institutions, rigid as they are, nevertheless have a certain capacity to adapt. They can adjust to a new situation just enough to prevent the revolutionary currents in civil society from making their presence felt, but not enough to alter the power situation on which they themselves rest. In this way, revolutionary opportunities can be missed, and the decline of civil society can continue unchecked for decades, which is what happened in Ancient Greece and in Italy in the Modern Age.

It may be useful also in this regard to cite the example of the process of European unification, which, on more than one occasion, has found itself on the brink of an out-and-out revolutionary transformation: we may think of the struggle for the European Defence Community, or the creation of the single European currency, or the profound foreign policy and monetary crisis in which Europe finds itself now, in the wake of the

war in Iraq, and the enlargement of the membership of the European Union. But the process has failed to find within itself the energy needed to progress from a general aspiration for change to the formulation of a clear plan on the basis of which to begin a true political struggle.

6. *The Conditions for Revolution.*

In order for the revolutionary event to occur, three conditions have to be present. The first, as mentioned, is the manifestation of a crisis that is more than just an accumulation of contradictions in relation to the growing divergences between the demands of civil society and the responses to these demands that the political institutions are able to come up with: it has to be an acute and dramatic crisis in which the security of the citizens is at stake and the very foundations of their wellbeing jeopardized. This crisis can take the form of real disorder, or the real risk that such disorder will manifest itself: but it must, in any case, be concrete and imminent. To throw into question the existing order is to throw into question the very foundations of one's own existence. It is thus inconceivable that a significant section of public opinion will put its destiny on the line unless circumstances lead it to believe that its destiny *has already been* put on the line, by the force of events.

The second condition is a mobilization of the protagonist of the revolution, that is the people, effective holders of sovereignty and without whom the revolution, an event of enormous historical significance, could not take place; in addition, some of its leaders must have the capacity to direct popular currents, inevitably vague and instinctual, and to transform them into political choices, in other words, into a struggle that, albeit at the cost of a tortuous journey, full of U-turns and mistakes, will lead to the creation of a new order.

As we have already said, human societies, being made up of individuals endowed with reason and will, are nevertheless characterized by a measure of freedom, even though this is buried in a sort of underground space in their consciousness and comes to light only in critical historical moments.

This means that individuals nevertheless perceive, albeit partly unconsciously, the inadequacy of the institutions, when this inadequacy manifests itself, even though this perception is not expressed through active and conscious opposition. The messages that arrive from outside the system thus settle in the collective subconscious, ready to evolve into principles of action when the conditions are ripe. This also applies to

those who occupy the political institutions, or have roles connected with politics, whose capacity to perceive the provisional nature of the logic of the system is not totally taken away by their need to adapt to that logic, and makes some ready to lead the process of its transformation.

Both the section of the people that becomes an actor in the revolution, and the leaders who guide it, can detach themselves from the existing order in relation to which they retain a degree of autonomy. Were they a mechanical and total part of it, they would not be able to set themselves up on opposition to it. But this does not alter the fact that, if all that we have said is true, their autonomy, prior to the explosion of the revolutionary event, manifests itself not as a definite attitude, but in the form of presentiment and uneasy awareness. In truth, the citizens, until events degenerate, will continue to go about their business, and politicians to play their part, both helping to keep the scaffolding of the political-social system standing. They continue to be committed to their careers and to make and pursue their political choices. To break away from all this, they need something else: in particular, in addition to a precipitation of the situation, they need an initiative that originates from the outside.

7. Revolutionary Groups.

What we have to do, therefore, is identify the subjects who can prepare for the revolution, ahead of the explosive turn of events that will trigger it, and who can pave the way for the forces that will follow. They have to be free subjects, who can place themselves outside the equilibrium and who thus have no role in the system and serve it no purpose. In short, we have to establish whether the web of roles that make up the system offers the degree of flexibility that there has to be if it is to be sown with the seed of active change, the *grain of mustard seed* mentioned in the Gospels. In truth, this degree of freedom does exist. It can, as we have indicated a number of times, be glimpsed in the contradictions that are rife in society in the periods that precede revolutions, and it is personified in *revolutionaries*, that is, in those small groups that are present prior to all revolutions, that reflect and act *before* — often a long time before — explosive turns of events occur, and that are motivated not by the emergence of these events, but by the prospect of their coming — not by a need for power or by the power logic, but only by the freedom and clear-sightedness of historical wisdom.

The revolutionary, then, cannot and must not have a role in the system. Staying within the system means accepting its logic, not questioning its

basis, carrying out more or less correctly the tasks linked to one's role, and seeking the consensus of those who have an elevated position in politics or society, in short, telling them what they want to hear. As we have already said, when there is a high degree of compatibility between the institutions and civil society, the logic of the system is the logic of the advancing of civilization, which as a rule can come about only within the institutional order and by respecting its various roles and their hierarchy. But when these enter into conflict with one another, when the institutional order suffocates civil society and prevents it from advancing, when power becomes divorced from values because it has exhausted its function, to remain within the system and to accept its rules means to sacrifice one's freedom to one's career, renouncing one's prerogative to speak the truth. This is precisely why the phases that precede revolutions are phases characterized by the corruption of politics and of all activities that depend on or are linked to politics.

8. The Basis of the Revolutionary Vocation.

But if those who remain inside the system adapt to its rules and become increasingly corrupt as power becomes increasingly unable to fulfil its function, and if those who are outside the system have neither power, money, nor the possibility to mobilize public opinion, then how do revolutions — the great transformations of the political-social system — come about?

They can happen, and they do happen in history, because the fabric of the social system nevertheless presents tears — openings for freedom. This allows some to place themselves outside the system, to consider it and to contest it in its entirety, thereby paving the way for the revolution. But it must be made clear that until the acute crisis takes place, these openings are very restricted, and also that autonomy comes at a high price, given that the system is geared to suffocate any attempt to break away from it. This is a situation that, in many cases, is not the result of anyone's deliberate will, but is, for the most part, an objective reality. The existing order does not offer the revolutionary a role, because all its roles are geared to the perpetuation of the system. It thus follows that anyone wanting to question the system is destined to be an outcast, perceived by those inside it as a rather bizarre character who might deserve respect, but who *counts for nothing* because he never represents a realistic, short-term alternative to the current power (and political behaviour is conditioned only by the short term). Therefore, until the system is rocked by an acute

crisis, revolutionary groups are destined to be characterized substantially by their small size, by their low profile, and by the poor means at their disposal.

The vocation of the revolutionary is, in truth, based on a factor that escapes the influence of the political-social order: the intellectual and moral freedom of the individual, which the gratifications offered by the system, like the punishments it is able to meter out, can usually silence, but not suffocate completely. Without doubt, active membership of a revolutionary group, especially over many years, is psychologically, and sometimes materially, very difficult. Those who, despite having for a long time (especially in their youth) pursued a revolutionary design, are unable, in the long term, to put up with being politically isolated and outcast, will either leave the revolutionary group in order to devote themselves to a career at national level, or will try to get the group itself to come in from the cold, urging it to abandon its opposition to the institutional order and to adopt the line of compromise that the system itself has adopted in order to adjust, without jeopardizing its own foundations, to the evolution of civil society. In both these cases, the system re-absorbs the revolutionary currents that manifested themselves outside of it, or part of these currents, and confers on those who promoted them a minor role and a measure of visibility: but the price these ex-revolutionaries pay for these rewards is the loss of their identity.

The fact remains that the revolutionary cannot set himself apart from the world, nor conduct his action solely with a view to the long term. This is particularly true given that, in the ambit of a revolutionary situation, it is impossible to predict exactly when the acute crisis will come: it could well be imminent, and this is something that those preparing for it must bear in mind. The revolutionary group, therefore, must be present within the political framework and seek to increase its interlocutors, without ever forgetting its radical diversity from political parties and all other political alliances, which is based on the fact that its action is not an attempt to change the balance of power in the existing framework, but to prepare the *alternative* to the existing framework, instilling in the minds of politicians and citizens, even only as a presentiment and not as a conscious intention, the idea of the new regime or the new community that is taking shape in the belly of history.

After the Constitutional Treaty The Question of a Political Europe*

UGO DRAETTA

This discussion, which examines the question of a political Europe, or rather what the realization of a political Europe implies, must be preceded by a few preliminary remarks in order to banish any suggestion of Euroscepticism on my part. We should all, in fact, remember that no other geographical area boasts a level of integration equal to that which Europe, through the European Union, enjoys and which other international regional organizations take as a model. The creation of the single market has contributed enormously to the economic progress of the Community's member states and, beyond the purely economic sphere, the process of European integration has achieved the objective that its far-sighted founding fathers had in mind: to create the conditions for enduring peace among the states themselves. In today's 25-member Union, and also in a further enlarged Union — the EU indeed looks set to embrace more states in the not too distant future — there is no reason to believe that economic progress and enduring peace will not continue to characterize relations between the member states. This is an important achievement of which Europeans may justifiably be proud.

But in order to be able to continue this European journey, in pursuit of the political unification of the continent, we need to be well aware of the weaknesses of the current process of integration and of the limitations of the so-called European Constitution — weaknesses and limitations often masked by Community rhetoric and, if I might be permitted to say so, by a certain and rather widespread ignorance of the texts of the Treaties currently in force or in the process of being ratified. Unless light can be shed on these aspects, we will run the risk of losing sight of the objectives that need to be pursued and thus of doing the European cause a great disservice.

* This paper was delivered at the convention "Dopo il trattato costituzionale. La questione dell' Europa politica" held in Milan on January 31st 2005 and organized by the regional committee of former Italian parliamentarians, the Lombardy branch of ANCI, and the Lombardy headquarters of the AEDE and MFE.

The Weaknesses of the Process of European Integration.

The process of European integration continues to present two fundamental weaknesses: one is the democratic deficit, which undermines at root level the legitimacy of the European institutions, and the other the inefficiency of the current decision-making process.

With regard to the first problem, that of the democratic deficit, the progressive extension of European competences in the sphere of inter-individual relations (consumer protection, privacy, the environment, etc.) has continued to exacerbate a problem that, in truth, has dogged the European Community from its very outset. I refer to the fact that legislative acts (the regulations), which are liable to affect the citizens directly, are made by bodies (the Council, on the recommendation of the Commission) that have not been elected by the citizens and, furthermore, that are subject to no effective, parliamentary-style control. The member states' transfer of these competences to the Community has meant their effective removal from the sphere of democratic decision making and from the democratic control to which they would be subject were they exercised at national level.

Indeed, the European Parliament, although now enjoying greater democratic legitimization — it is now elected by direct universal suffrage —, has, within the ambit of the Community law making process, the right of veto only over the most important decisions. This gives it the capacity to block European legislation, but not to direct that legislation according to its own will. Indeed, European legislative power remains firmly in the hands of the European Council, on which sit the representatives of the executive powers of the member states. It is of course true that, with regard to the question of democratic control, it is the European Parliament that, in the ambit of the Community, has powers of political control, and that these can be likened to the powers that the national parliaments in the member states exercise in a representative democracy. But the analogy is a purely formal one, given that the European Parliament's powers of political control have none of the substance of national parliamentary control. In particular, this political control is exercised over the Commission — not always in a coherent way, as recent episodes linked to the installation of the Barroso Commission have shown —, but it is not exercised over the body that is, in the final analysis, the repository of legislative power, i.e., the Council. Thus, even political control within the European system appears to be undermined by the existence of a basic democratic deficit, and the control that the national parliaments can

exercise over the single members of the Council is too remote to remedy this deficit.

Clearly, there is only one way in which the democratic deficit can be eliminated, and that is to apply, within the European setting, a principle that has become deep rooted within the member states: I refer to the principle of the separation of powers, according to which legislative power is attributed to a democratically elected body, which also has political control over the executive power. This could be achieved in two ways, either by giving the European Parliament the legislative power within the Community (at the same time taking this power away from the Council, its present holder), or by having the citizens elect the Council directly, thereby transforming it from a representative body of the states into a sort of Higher Chamber or Senate, within a federal bicameral structure in which regional interests would be represented. But, of course, these solutions would imply movements in a federal direction, and thus the relinquishing of sovereignty by the member states — movements currently unthinkable to most of the twenty-five members of the European Union. This explains why, in spite of the fact that all the recent intergovernmental conferences convened to revise the Treaties have set themselves the task of finding a solution to the problem of the democratic deficit, the solution itself has been repeatedly postponed from one meeting to the next, and the problem has remained unsolved. Paradoxically, states that rightly regard themselves as pioneers of democracy and as defenders of the values of democracy at world level have, in the European Community, built themselves a very weakly democratic structure. This situation is, among other things, one of the main reasons for the current loss of faith in the European ideal among the continent's citizens.

On the other hand, to be realistic, it must be acknowledged that in the current stage of European integration, characterized by the abiding sovereignty of the member states, ultimate decision-making power cannot fail to take into account the will of the Council, which represents these states. Hence it must also be appreciated that the exercising of political control by the European Parliament over the Council would be possible only through a qualitative leap forward that would see Europe projected into an entirely different scenario, in which the member states would lose their status as sovereign subjects of international law and Community law would become the internal law of a new, federal type subject.

I will return later to the inefficiency of the decision-making process and the failure to find a solution to this problem. However, both the

aforementioned problems, the democratic deficit and the inefficiency of the decision-making process, are destined, unless they can be resolved, to prevent the European Union from rising successfully to the challenges that now face it.

The Challenges Facing Europe.

These challenges are generally acknowledged to be the creation of a *common foreign and security policy* and of a *single European economic policy*. Without the former, the individual member states will, in the current global scenario, have no choice but to yield to the current dominant power or mount an opposition to that power that will be as sterile as it will be futile. On the other hand, a Europe equipped with its own foreign and security policy, *apolitical Europe*, could become — also within the United Nations — an effective balancing influence, drawing, in this role, on the ideals of democracy, liberty and respect for the rule of law that form its cultural heritage and on which the European Union is founded. But as long as Europe continues to lack a common foreign policy, it is meaningless to envisage a European seat at the UN, indispensable as this would be. Let us move on to the second challenge, that of a single economic policy for the European Union. Without such a policy the single currency itself cannot be regarded as an enduring and irreversible achievement, as the shrewdest economists have long been arguing and as current difficulties related to the Stability Pact demonstrate.

Neither of the methods through which the process of European integration has advanced to date, i.e., the *intergovernmental method* and the *Community method*, appear adequate to meet the above challenges. The first is too conditioned by the unanimity rule to bring appreciable results. It presupposes concerted efforts on the part of the member states that, in turn, presuppose a more than occasional coincidence of their particular interests — something that is far from easy to achieve, as the events even of recent history have shown us. The dissent of just one of the twenty-five member states would be sufficient to paralyze the Union and prevent it from acting.

Neither is it conceivable that the Community method, given its inherent democratic deficit, might, even in the unlikely event of a strengthening and simplification of the decision-making process, lead to the adoption of a common foreign and security policy or a single European economic policy. Indeed, decisions on matters of crucial importance (involving a choice between peace and war) and fiscal policy

decisions (implicit in the definition of a common economic policy) can be referred only to democratically elected bodies. They cannot be entrusted to bureaucratic or executive bodies that escape effective democratic control.

Therefore, realistically, and looking beyond European rhetoric, it must be acknowledged that the twenty-five-member European Union really has reached a crossroads. If nothing changes, the process of European integration will see the member states re-appropriating some of the competences previously transferred to European level (thanks to the intergovernmental method's gaining sway over the Community method, of which there are already clear signs); the process will also, increasingly, follow essentially economic lines: the development of the internal market and the progressive expansion of this market to new states. This will be a complex undertaking and one that will absorb Europe's energies for some considerable time, given the economic situation of these new states. As indicated earlier, it is also an objective that must not be underestimated and that is certainly worth pursuing, given the undoubted advantages it will bring both the new and the old member states. In the context of Europe's pursuit of these essentially economic objectives, the democratic deficit will appear tolerable and Europe's decision-making process will probably be appropriately adjusted. In following this direction, however, and this is indeed the direction in which the process of building Europe seems inevitably to be moving, the European Union will have to abandon any more ambitious plans it might have for a single common and security policy and for a single economic policy: in other words, its plans for a political Europe, with all the consequences that this would bring. If, on the other hand, the member states are determined to pursue these latter objectives, they will have to use methods other than the intergovernmental and Community methods, finding solutions that deal with the problem of the democratic deficit and that introduce an efficient decision-making process.

The Federal Method.

The only method that will allow Europe to rise to and overcome the challenges it faces is the *federal method*, understood (according to the commonly accepted meaning of the term) as the transfer, by formerly sovereign states, of competences (few in number or more numerous) to a central power. As a result of this process, the formerly sovereign states become federated states and lose their status as players on the interna-

tional stage, a role that instead falls exclusively to the new federal state. There is no doubt that use of the term “federal” can sometimes seem *politically incorrect*, given that it has, in spite of repeated attempts to insert it, been systematically excluded from the revised Treaties. This is due to the obvious resistance on the part of the member states which, like individuals, have a strong instinct for self-preservation.

If the federal method is the only one through which it is possible to pursue the most ambitious objectives, which everyone seems to want to see realized, it is also clear that the European federation would have to be a “softly-treading” entity, whose competences would be limited strictly to those it would necessarily have to assume in its attempt to forge a common foreign and security policy and a single European economic policy. All the other competences would remain in the hands of the federated states. It would not be a “superstate” — this expression has authoritarian connotations and, for this reason, is sometimes exploited by supporters of the nation-state wanting to prevent movements in a federal direction —, but instead a state in which all Europeans would be democratically represented and, thanks to its ability to combine European, national and regional identities, one with which they would feel able to identify. Equally, this federal state would have nothing in common with certain ambiguous and contradictory formulas that have been advanced, such as the “Federation of Nation-States” or the “Federation of Sovereign States,” behind which, again, there sometimes lurk supporters of the nation-state.

So who can, realistically, begin a movement towards a European federation? The member states, naturally enough, are inclined to look after their own interests, and first and foremost to seek to retain their sovereignty. Political parties confront one another in their bid to win, or to hold on to, power. Since this power is to be found at nation-state level, this is the level at which political debate unfolds, even when it is a question of electing the members of the European Parliament.

Unless the European Parliament, strengthened by a position of uncontested democratic legitimacy, manages to find within itself the courage to set itself up as a Constituent Assembly, a true “Convention,” all we can do is hope for a repeat of those golden years in which the founding fathers of European integration and Europe’s heads of state and of government were one and the same. Unfortunately, neither scenario looks likely.

However, even though there is little cause for optimism, I feel that it is our duty to identify correctly the options facing Europe at the cross-

roads it has now reached. To succeed in this duty may in itself be considered an important achievement, constituting the premise, at least, for the reaching of conscious decisions. But, rhetoric and misinformation often prevail and confusion reigns, exacerbated by a widespread “corruption” of the terminology used in the debate. The very expression “European Constitution” is a case in point.

The Constitutional Treaty.

The text of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe — often, for the sake of brevity, referred to as the “European Constitution” — is long and does not make for easy reading. Its 341 pages include over 448 articles that bring together the articles previously included in the Treaty on European Union, in the Treaties establishing the European Community and in the European Union’s Charter of Fundamental Rights; its 40 or so annexed protocols occupy a further 382 pages and there are also 50 annexed declarations, which add a further 121 pages. Those who drafted the Treaty have clearly failed in one of their objectives, which was to simplify it and turn it into a streamlined and readily comprehensible document. Finally, to talk knowledgably about the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe is difficult even for those who have the will, and the knowledge and expertise to do so. It is practically impossible for anyone who is not well acquainted with the previous Treaties and is thus unable to appreciate the differences between old and new texts. Clearly then, the idea of putting a text of this kind to referendum, as around a dozen of the European member states plan to do, poses the problem of the near impossibility of reducing this complex and muddled document to a single question that can be answered with a simple “Yes” or “No.”

In short, the new Treaty is just another revision — following those of The Single European Act (1987), of Maastricht (1993), of Amsterdam (1999), and of Nice (2003) — of the Treaty of Rome and of the Treaty on European Union. But whereas the previous revisions all stood out for some particular achievement (for example, the SEA introduced the internal market, Maastricht brought in the single currency and Amsterdam the agreement on social policy, and Nice marked the start of the restructuring of the European institutions in preparation for enlargement of the EU), it is much more difficult to pinpoint a similar feature characterizing the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. There is no doubt that it introduces a series of modifications many of which are necessary and opportune, and on the basis of these alone, it should

certainly be signed and hopefully be brought into force, but none of the changes it introduces justifies its being referred to, even loosely and inaccurately, as a “Constitution.” In particular, neither the fusion of the three so-called pillars of the European Union, nor the incorporation, in Part II of the new Treaty, of articles from the present European Charter of Fundamental Rights, can be deemed to be of “constitutional” import.

Other changes include adjustments of the powers of the European institutions and of the sphere of Community competences. All the previous revisions of the Treaty of Rome introduced changes of this kind, and even further-reaching ones.

There still remains the problem of the decision-making process within the European Community, and particularly that of the Council’s reaching of decisions by unanimity or by a qualified majority, a problem that ought to have been solved in order to prevent paralysis of the decision-making process following the Union’s enlargement to twenty-five members and also in order to set the European Union definitively on the road towards constitutional/federalist forms of integration. With regard to this problem, we can recall that the Italian government, during its presidency of the EU in the second half of 2003, failed in its efforts to find a solution acceptable to Spain and Poland (among others), which were concerned with protecting their national interests.

The current system derives from the Nice Treaty, modified by the Act of Adhesion which came into force on May 1st, 2004. In around 50 situations (all relating to key areas), it allows only unanimous decisions, i.e., that require the consensus of all twenty-five member states. For decisions that can be taken by a qualified majority, the current rules require the reaching of a given quota of weighted votes. This weighted voting system has been present since the very start of the European Community and in a Community made up of a small number of members, it was a logical solution. With each subsequent enlargement of the Community, the weighting of the votes was adjusted to take the new states into account, but the system itself remained the same. In today’s 25-member Union, it has become difficult to manage. One need only consider the fact that the so-called blocking minority, that is the number of votes required to block a decision that must be taken by a qualified majority, can currently be reached by three large states in alliance with one small state, including Malta, and that this combination is all that it takes to block a decision by the Council on which all the other twenty-one states are in agreement.

The need to eliminate the weighted voting system upon the enlarge-

ment of the EU to twenty-five members and to replace it with a simpler, more efficient system had been evident for a long time. Indeed, this would have been an important — possibly the only important — innovation introduced by the new Treaty.

Instead, the Treaty establishing the so-called Constitution for Europe, has, in twenty-five cases, retained the unanimity requirement in relation to decisions in areas of capital importance — for example, fiscal, social, foreign and security policy, cohesion (i.e., structural aid), justice and internal affairs —, thus limiting the chances of progressing towards deeper forms of integration in these fields. As regards cases in which provision is made for decisions by a qualified majority, the original text — not approved — of the Draft Treaty stated that the system of weighted voting would be eliminated as from November 1st, 2009, after which date any decision by a qualified majority would have to be based on its ratification by the majority (currently thirteen out of the twenty-five states), providing this majority represented at least 60 per cent of the total population of the EU. Although this formula would not have improved the decision-making process that much, it would have rendered it more simple. However, it generated the insurmountable objections of Spain and Poland, to which I alluded earlier.

More negotiations followed. In order to placate the objectors (in view of the need to approve the new Treaty unanimously), the formula ultimately included was completely different (even though 1st November 2009 was kept as the date for its application), and, as a result, muddled and complex. Indeed, the new Treaty states that “a qualified majority shall be defined as at least 55 per cent of the other members of the Council, representing member states comprising at least 65 per cent of the population of the participating member states.” Thus, as long as the EU continues to have twenty-five members, the agreement of fifteen states will be required (and not 14 as in the case of the 55 per cent formula). The threshold of the total EU population was increased to 65 per cent to satisfy Spain and Poland. To complicate the decision-making process further, a document has, with the agreement of the member states, been annexed to the new Treaty. This document states that if a number of members of the Council representing the number of member states (or the population threshold) needed to constitute a blocking minority indicate their opposition to the Council’s reaching of a decision by a qualified majority, the Council will do all it can, “within a reasonable time and without prejudicing obligatory time limits laid down by Union law,” to reach a satisfactory solution that takes into account the concerns of the aforesaid

members of the Council. This is a contorted way of saying that a substantial level of unanimity will still have to be sought.

It seems highly unlikely that these rules, moreover not applicable until November 1st, 2009, will help to increase the decision-making efficiency of a Union that already has twenty-five members and appears destined to grow, and thereby prevent its machinery from seizing up altogether. In the meantime, the current system, imperfect by definition (given the recognition of the need to change it) will continue to be employed.

With regard to the other question, that of the democratic deficit, which I mentioned earlier, the new Treaty does not even tackle this problem: as we have seen, this deficit can only be eliminated through the attribution of legislative powers to the European Parliament (or through the direct election of the Council, which currently holds these powers), in short, through a federal solution of the kind none of the member states currently appears to favour.

In this framework, the choice of the term "Constitution" for the new Treaty emerges as particularly unfortunate. It is not a Constitution because it does not have the necessary requisites, either in form (drafting by a democratically elected constituent assembly), or substance (failure to make provision, in the constitution, for democratically elected legislative bodies). The term "Constitution" will serve only to alarm and distance still further from the European cause the electors in some countries, such as the United Kingdom, that plan to put the question of their ratification of the Treaty to popular referendum. The fact is, there can exist states without a constitution, but not a constitution without a state. Given that the European Union is not remotely comparable to a federal state, to talk of "Constitution," in reference to what is nothing more than a fifth revision of the Treaty of Rome, is simply to stir up pernicious confusion and to generate expectations or fears (depending on the point of view) that are totally without justification.

Europe at a Crossroads.

In spite of all these observations, it will nevertheless be a good thing if the new Treaty is ratified and comes into force, as it will (like the previous modifying Treaties) result in certain sorely-needed improvements, of a mainly technical nature, to the current situation. In Italy, it falls to the President of the Republic to ratify the Treaty, and he is authorized in this task by the Parliament, through a special law. This law

authorizing this ratification by the President also contains the implementation order needed for the subsequent incorporation of the Treaty into Italian law (art. 80 of the Italian Constitution). This was the procedure adopted for the Treaty of Rome and for subsequent modifications of the same. No provision is made for referenda either on the Parliament's authorization of the President's ratification of international treaties, or on possible repeals of the laws that allow such authorizations (art. 70 of the Italian Constitution). On just one occasion, through a special Constitutional law (n. 2 of April 3rd 1989), provision was made for the proclamation of a referendum of orientation in relation to the conferring of a constituent mandate on the European Parliament, on the occasion the 1989 European Parliamentary elections. Were we now, once again, hypothetically, to consider a similar initiative, that is, a referendum of orientation, it would be essential to focus attention on one question, simple but that encapsulated the challenges currently faced by the process of European integration with regard to its progress towards a political Europe. I will begin by attempting to formulate this question, and then briefly consider its implications: "Do the citizens of Italy wish the Italian state to renounce its sovereign prerogatives in matters relating to foreign, security and economic policy, and to confer these prerogatives on a European Union that, in this way, would become a federal state, or do the citizens of Italy wish to renounce the possibility of a truly European foreign, security and economic policy, leaving the European Union, as a result, to concentrate on exclusively economic forms of integration along the lines of a strengthened customs union?"

Let me explain this question better. The first alternative is clear: if one genuinely wants a single foreign, security and economic policy, and thus a political Europe, it follows that in these three spheres the states wishing to follow this course (which, in all probability, would be far fewer in number than the current twenty-five) would have to renounce their national sovereignty and transfer it to a new entity that would be responsible, through a democratically elected body, for making decisions in these areas. One may call this entity by many different names, but substantially it would be a federal state. The other alternative is for Europe consciously to give up the possibility of a single foreign, security and economic policy and concentrate, instead, on the forms of economic integration that have to date, enjoyed success, and that would probably grant the prospect of economic progress and peace to a much larger area of Europe, which could easily be extended to include yet more states (Turkey, Russia, Israel, Morocco, etc.).

But going beyond Community rhetoric and the effusive tones of the Preamble to the Treaty, the signing of which Italy hosted, these are the real terms of the problem. Each of the alternatives presented has its rationale: the important thing is to define correctly what, in each case, this rationale is, and not to claim that this new Treaty gives us either a true Constitution, or the true unitary foreign, security and economic policies that there have to be if we are to be able to talk of a political Europe. A referendum of orientation on these questions would not weaken Italy's support for a Treaty to whose negotiation it has made such a huge contribution, but it would serve to establish whether there exist the conditions that might allow our country to set itself more ambitious objectives with regard to its policy on Europe, in the full awareness of what the new Treaty effectively gives us, and above all, of that from which it distances us: the dream of a federal Europe, the inspiration of the founding fathers of the Community of Six, the dream of a political Europe, the "European dream" *tout court*, which does not necessarily coincide with the "American dream."

Let us return, then, to the federal hypothesis. Clearly, if hypothesizing a federal future was impossible when the European Community numbered fifteen states (because of the considerable divergences between its members and the radical opposition on the part of the United Kingdom), the question cannot even be put to the European Union's newest members: these are countries that are enjoying freedoms and liberties too long denied them, and which they certainly would not be willing to jeopardize in the name of a European Federation. In fact, they are countries in which, on the contrary, strong nationalistic tendencies are now emerging. Thus, it is only within the ambit of a small number of states that efforts to found a European federation have any hope of success, that is within the ambit of a "hard core" of states that ultimately comes down to the six countries that first began the process of European integration. I am talking about a European federation that is a vital and active member of a European Union that might eventually and without reservations be enlarged to include yet more states, i.e., a federation within the confederation; a federation that all the states of the Union would be free, subsequently, to join and that would thus serve as a magnet, attracting all those states that share its ideals. This is exactly what happened at the start of the EEC, which all the EFTA states, including the United Kingdom, progressively joined. On the basis of this precedent, it is easy to predict that, if Europe's founding states can find within themselves the courage needed to take the initiative and form the first federal core, then gradually all, or almost all,

the states of the Union will follow their example and join as well. In this way, the Union will become a solid and economically well-governed political reality, founded on popular sovereignty, and a leading actor on the world political stage.

Notes

THE UKRAINE AND THE GLOBAL EQUILIBRIUM

The particular importance of the fate of the Ukraine derives from the country's highly strategic position on the international "chessboard." Indeed, the Ukraine lies on the dividing line between two spheres of influence, and the recent crisis over its future — to remain part of the Russian sphere of influence or to become part of the Western world (or more accurately, the NATO area) —, has only in part been resolved by the election of the pro-Western candidate, Viktor Yuschenko, as president.

A number of factors contributed to the result of these troubled elections: the rampant corruption under the Kuchma regime, the desire on the part of most of the population of western Ukraine for a better standard of living and a higher level of economic development, and the considerable pressures, both political and financial, undoubtedly exerted by the United States, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as by some states in the region, such as Georgia, Poland and Lithuania, that, for one reason or another, already find themselves in the orbit of the United States. It must also be recalled that many Western agencies of various kinds were already present, in different capacities, in the Ukraine, and that the services and aid they provided were distributed with equal measures of pro-Western propaganda. But what it is most important to highlight, leaving aside the reasons for the choice made by the Ukrainian people, is the probable impact of this "change of sides" on the fate of the Ukraine as a whole, and on the configuration of the whole global order.

What is at stake, primarily, is the Ukraine's geopolitical position. First of all, there can be no doubting the depth of the economic interdependence between the Republic of the Ukraine (a member of the Community of Independent States) and the Russian federation: Russia supplies 35.8 per cent of Ukrainian imports and exercises broad control over its

energy transportation network. For its part, the Ukraine collaborates closely with Russia in the arms, aeronautical, and space industries, and is a major supplier of the Russian army.

The two areas thus share strong economic links that are certainly not going to be dissolved overnight. The problem is a different one. It is a question of seeing how this interdependence can be managed politically — particularly with regard to the two countries' collaboration over sensitive military information — and how the Ukraine might fit into the regional integration that Russia is counting on establishing with Belarus, Kazakhstan and Armenia. In short, it is a question of seeing whether Russia can prevent the Ukraine, once its solid ally, from turning into an unreliable partner that is ready, in the interests of the United States, to use its interdependence with Russia as a means of “holding Russia to ransom.”

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The problem also concerns the Ukraine's economic development. We might legitimately ask ourselves whether the Ukraine, as part of a unified economic area, will best serve its objective of increased wealth and harmonious development by exploiting the economic and political synergies that derive from this interdependence, or whether, instead, it stands to benefit more from its new role as “Trojan horse” for the United States vis-à-vis Russia, as NATO member, and even, in the far-distant future, as the most eastern outpost of the European Union (with all the ambiguities, reciprocal threats and tensions that would accompany this position).

But there is certainly more at stake than just the economic development of the Ukraine. This situation throws into question not only the political equilibrium of the whole of eastern Europe, but also, beyond this, the vital interests of Russia. Following the dramatic collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia, a vast country with enormous resources, is slowly and laboriously rebuilding its power, its administrative structure and its economy. However, beset by hostile neighbours and by secessionist tendencies in several of its republics, it has now come to a crossroads: a point from which it may either recover its position as a great power, with enormous potential for growth, or spiral into chaos, disintegration and backwardness. This explains why it is of vital importance to Russia (for its very survival) to prevent the secession of Chechnya, a small republic but one that is located in a highly strategic position, and equally, why it

is so important to Russia to stop its traditional ally, the Ukraine — a much larger country than Chechnya —, from joining the Western camp.

* * *

In the Western world, these developments have been met with two different attitudes. Let us consider, first, that of the United States. The United States is guided by the theory of political realism, according to which a power should concentrate, primarily, on trying to weaken as much as possible all those powers that may constitute a threat to the maintenance and strengthening of its own position. Indeed, this is the idea that (notwithstanding inevitable concessions due to the size and the wealth of the Russian federation) has underpinned American policy since the collapse of the Soviet Union — a policy that has been veiled in the transparent hypocrisy of its mission to “export democracy.” It was on this basis that Washington actively and unreservedly lent its support to the presidential campaign of Yushchenko, and constantly worked to undermine Russia’s influence in the Ukraine.

But has this policy amounted to correct application of the *raison d’état* theory, and favoured the proper pursuit of American interests and the consolidation of American power in the world? The answer to this question can only be that it has not. The power of any hegemonic state is a limited resource, dependent upon its production capacity, its military might, its technological strength, and the consensus it enjoys among its citizens, as well as the support it is able to generate within and outside its own sphere of influence. It is a resource that cannot be used indiscriminately whenever — and wherever in the world — the hegemonic power in an area of conflict finds itself up against a real or potential antagonist. Because the biggest danger that a great power can face is that of overstretching itself, i.e., of taking on international responsibilities in excess of its resources and, as a result, of being worn down in its attempt — inevitably unsuccessful — to govern haphazardly and in the absence of a coherent policy an area of the world that is too big and that presents problems that are too numerous and too complex for it to deal with.

Realpolitik certainly cannot be taken to mean striving to increase one’s own power indiscriminately, whenever the opportunity arises; instead, it should be interpreted as a patient and rational endeavour whose purpose is to create and to maintain a stable and lasting international equilibrium that allows the hegemonic state to distribute its power resources among the different areas within its sphere of influence,

according to their strategic importance, and to rebuild these resources as they are depleted, in such a way as to ensure that its leadership remains intact and accepted by its allies.

Instead, the aim of the United States, as it seeks to weaken Russia by surrounding it — as we have seen in the case of the Ukraine — with a ring of weak, unstable and unreliable states, is to destroy any possible equilibrium. And given the United States' lack of a clear design, this action is having the effect of increasing, rather than reducing, the parts of the world that are in the grip of chaos and disintegration, and thus of reducing, rather than increasing, the United States' own capacity to lead a world that is becoming ever more anarchic and unstable.

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The position of the European Union, on the other hand, is of a similar orientation but rests on entirely different motivations. The European policy — if we can indeed describe it as such — compared to the American policy is the policy of a group of powerless and servile states compared to that of a state which, despite exhibiting serious and dangerous deficiencies in its foreign policy, nevertheless continues to be the world's most important centre of power. Indeed, in the recent Ukrainian crisis, the European Union played a dubious and hypocritical role, acting as the vanguard in (and as a cover for) NATO's attempt to control the Russian federation along its European and Caucasian borders.

The European Union cannot be said to be playing power politics. Instead, its action is motivated by a sort of "democratic benevolence" based on the erroneous and dangerous conviction that Western Europe owes its relatively peaceful enjoyment of decades of democracy (since the end of World War II) not to the peculiarities of the international situation in which Europe, thanks to the protection of NATO and the supremacy of the dollar, found itself through to the end of the Cold War and beyond, but to the very fact of its impotence. According to this view, this impotence is what allowed Europe to abandon the canons of *Realpolitik* and concentrate instead on improving its democratic institutions, on stepping up its international collaboration, and on increasing the Europeans' quality of life through the redirection of resources away from military purposes and into peaceful uses: the improvement of social services, the development and spread of culture, the enrichment of civil cohabitation.

It can be noted that, paradoxically, this idea began to take root in

Europe (thanks in part to the tendency of political journalism — in Europe and in America — to be easily swayed by power and by fashionable views) right at the start of the 1990s, in other words at the time when the incapacity of European values to sustain the impact of those of the English-speaking world, founded on economic efficiency and social Darwinism, was becoming macroscopically apparent, precisely because of the growing divergence of interests between Europe and the United States (now reflected in the alarming political, economic and technological gap that separates the two areas). But this incontrovertible fact does not seem to have influenced in the slightest the skewed perception of reality of most European politicians and intellectuals, in other words, their conviction that repeated enlargement of the European Union is a sign of the political and moral superiority of European “soft power” over American “hard power” (as though the former could exist in the absence of the latter). The terms “state”, “sovereignty” and “power”, considered to belong to the language of international and internal relations of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, have been practically expunged from Europe’s political vocabulary; meanwhile, according to this view, Europe has now entered a “post-modern” stage, in which it is substantially free from power ties, these having been replaced by a network of relations based not on law enforced through the state’s exercising of sovereignty, but on the free accord among parties. Clearly, on this basis, the enlargement of the European Union to 25, and in the future to 27, 28 or even more members, and its resulting transformation into a free trade area, devoid of any binding influence over the policies of its members, is regarded as undeniable proof of the success of this philosophy. At the same time, Europe’s political unification is viewed as a superseded stage of history that has little bearing either on the wellbeing of the Europeans of today or of tomorrow, or on the stability of the global equilibrium.

* * *

The case of the Ukraine has helped to clarify the dramatic choice facing the world today. Providing it is managed in accordance with the correct application of the canons of *Realpolitik*, i.e., with wisdom and moderation, the clash between the forces in the field will result in the emergence of a more stable global equilibrium, which will be destined to evolve in the direction of closer collaboration and broader integration; if it is not, we will see a marked increase in the instability and fragmentation

characteristic of the current global equilibrium. This second scenario would clearly manifest itself at the expense of the interests of the Russian federation, and could have one of only two outcomes. The first, which would emerge should the Russian federation prove unable to summon the strength to react to the insane American and NATO policy towards it, would be a second disintegration of Russia (the first having come with the dramatic collapse of the old Soviet Union) — a tragic turn of events that would turn Russia into a vast area of permanent political upheaval, of economic devastation, of social instability and of civil decline. But it is an unlikely outcome. Russia is a huge country with vast economic resources; it has a government that, in spite of the undoubted persistence of a high level of corruption and a strong democratic deficit, is winning the support of public opinion, and it is currently rebuilding both its army and its administrative structure: it will not cave in. But should Russia feel its borders to be increasingly under threat, it will react by stepping up, in its own defence, its mobilization of the political, economic and military resources at its disposal. And this would have the effect, on the one hand, of interrupting, or slowing down, the difficult process of democratization of the institutions and of the way of life that is currently under way in the country, and on the other — and here we refer to the sphere of international relations — it would have a negative effect on the already precarious global equilibrium, and lead to the rebirth, albeit in new forms, of the contrapositions of the past. And the European Union, hypocritically comfortable in the illusion of its own moral superiority, but in reality devoid of a role, a policy and even the dignity of a bit part in the global drama, would merely look on.

Francesco Rossolillo

THE EUROPEAN ECONOMY AND THE CHALLENGE FROM ASIA

1. The Emerging Forces of the World Economy.

The importance that Europe has had over the last few centuries in the promotion of economic development, the contributions it has made to the emancipation of humanity from poverty and from subsistence-level living conditions, the successes it has achieved in terms of a model of social protection that is unparalleled anywhere in the world, and in terms of economic and monetary integration in an area covered by many states, cannot and must not allow us to lose sight of the fact that new more dynamic and powerful subjects are emerging at the international level. We can all plainly see that the new reality of our period, over the next few decades, risks being not the creation of a European economic, monetary and political pole, but the rise of two Asian giants: China and India. If the economic growth of these two States remains at recent rates, within a few decades we will witness the definitive surmounting of almost five centuries of European and colonial domination in Asia. This is not only a trend discernible from the appearance and opening up of the enormous demographic potential of these two countries to the opportunities offered by international trade and technological innovation, but it is also and above all, especially for China, the progressive manifestation of the *puissance*, through conscious political choices, of two large subcontinents on the world stage.

China and India, after having gained their independence halfway through the last century, began their slow game of catch-up with the Western world. In the mid-Seventies of the last century the per-capita GDP of the Chinese and Indians was about one twentieth of that of the Americans. At the beginning of the Twentieth Century the per-capita income of China was 15 per cent of that of the USA and the Indian one was half of the Chinese. If both these great Asian States have done a lot to close the gap in terms of well being, productive capacity and technological innovation with respect to the USA and Europe, then China has undoubtedly been the better performer of the two. Between 1980 and 2003 the Chinese economy grew at an average rate of 9.5 per cent a year (against 5.7 per cent in India), while over the same period the Chinese per-capita income grew by 300 per cent (against 125 per cent of the one in India). These are phenomena that have already occurred in the past in a few Asian countries that, within a generation, have been able to bridge the

enormous gaps between them and the Western economies. The growth of China from 1978 to today is comparable to that experienced by Japan between 1950 and 1970, to that of Taiwan between 1958 and the end of the Eighties, and to that of South Korea between 1960 and the early Nineties.

The fact that the per-capita product in China compared to that in the USA today is comparable to that of South Korea in 1972, of Taiwan in 1966, and of Japan in 1950, is a proof on the one hand of the enormous efforts made by that country to raise the well-being of its citizens beginning from a lower level of development than its Asian neighbours, and on the other it must make us reflect on the enormous productive, economic and commercial potential that it may yet generate. Under these indicators India is still way back compared to China, its per-capita income compared to the USA being equal to that reached by China in the mid-Eighties (and in absolute terms equal to that of China at the start of the Nineties). In terms of time this is a delay of about a decade or slightly more, which counts for something in the bilateral relations between India and China, but it does not detract from the weight that both these countries are bringing to bear internationally. It is no coincidence that various projections of the growth of the GDP of these two countries show that they are both on the verge of surpassing the GDP of individual European countries by 2015 and of reaching that of the European Union and the USA by the middle of this century. Already in 2003 China was the fourth largest general exporter in the world and the ninth in the commercial services sector (in the same year India held the thirty-first and the twenty-first spot respectively). In this race the Chinese State was shown to be more effective and ready to invest in human resources (in 2000 China counted a 6 per cent illiteracy rate, against India's 35 per cent), in channelling and encouraging domestic savings (which represent 44 per cent of GDP, against 22 per cent in India), in domestic investments (in absolute terms China invests eight times more than India in internal infrastructure, corresponding to three times more in terms of GDP percentage terms). But the leap forward made by China, that allowed it to link up with the industrial economies, is better represented by another statistic: the population of Chinese employed in agriculture went from 68 per cent of the total in 1981 to 45 per cent in 2001 (compared to a shift from 67 per cent to 59 per cent over the same period in India).

What this meant and still means, not only for the Chinese economy but also for the entire world economy, will be analysed schematically shortly. For the time being these facts suffice to show that the entry of these two

new entities into the world market and the global balance of power cannot be ignored when we consider the future of the European economy and the problem of how it can be governed.

2. The Unstable Dollar-Renminbi Balance.

Until about twenty years ago the peripheral countries and the emerging Asian markets (except Japan) carried little weight at the world level. Today not only have they become very important, but in so far as they are of truly continental proportions, in the case of China and India, they represent forces capable of producing great imbalances in international trade and the movement of capital. What are the material bases of this change?

In the first place regions that until twenty years ago were isolated worlds all to themselves — the world of the rich regions of Europe, the USA and Japan on the one hand and that of the Communist Chinese-Soviet world on the other — due to the sudden collapse of the USSR and the strategic choice made by China to stimulate its own development by basing itself on the promotion of exports — especially towards the USA at first — began to interact in a single global market. This choice paved the way for the policies adopted by the other Asian countries. The alternative strategy could have consisted in attracting capital from the richest and most industrialised regions in order to promote domestic demand and the absorption of excess labour thanks to a consumption revolution. But for various reasons this path was not chosen. On the one hand the Chinese government itself has had difficulties in promoting economic and financial policies, the success of which would in any case have depended largely on outside help, suited to the magnitude of the problems that needed to be solved. On the other hand the detachment from the political and economic protection of the former-USSR first and the start of the regional confrontation with America later, strongly conditioned the Beijing government's choices in terms of production. Finally the state of political and financial impotence Europeans found themselves in had left China without any credible Western interlocutors at the financial, commercial and military level other than the USA.

Having chosen the path towards development, and thus the way out of the pre-industrial stage, it was a matter of life or death for China to be able to re-employ the labour that would progressively be made available following the abandonment of agriculture, in productive industrial activity. The imbalances in the exchange rates that we see today between

dollar/euro and the other currencies of the most industrialised countries, countered by the relative stability in the exchange rates between dollar/renminbi and the other Asian currencies, is therefore the reflection of a material imbalance that has come about internationally, due to the enormous size of the labour force that the Asian region is introducing into the global industrial production circuit.¹ To get an idea of the size of this excess, and referring only to China, we need to bear in mind that in order to survive, the Chinese economic and political system must in the near future address the problem of how, over the next two decades, it is going to employ at least two hundred million people in industry and the service sector, of whom at least a quarter will contribute to sustaining exports. We are talking about an additional labour force equivalent to that already employed in Europe and in North America and well over that employed in Japan. It will therefore be the speed and the capacity of absorption into the Chinese labour market of this new force (to which we can add the labour reserves currently being created in the other Asian countries and in India especially) that determines the international trade and monetary balances and imbalances of the next few years. But the speed and the capacity of absorption of the Chinese labour force will inevitably depend, as well as from the choices that the Chinese government is going to carry out, on the policies of trade and economic cooperation or conflict that the other world actors, particularly the USA, will decide to pursue.

For the time being, notwithstanding the facade of protest, the USA benefit from this situation, being the holders of the currency of reference for the so-called new Asian Bretton Woods area that has established itself by now around the dollar-renminbi relationship: it is precisely thanks to the flow of Asian investments into America — especially in the form of purchased US Treasury Bonds — that the USA have been able to afford to fund their colossal trade deficit and the upkeep of their military apparatus. At the same time, precisely because the USA are well aware of the potential of Chinese development and of the fact that China represents a competing pole of power at both the regional and global levels, they have no interest in developing a sincere policy of cooperation with the Chinese government, and they do not miss the chance to try to contain its technological and military expansion. Just as the Russian-American conflict of the last century was characterised by the equilibrium of nuclear fear, today the head-to-head between America and China is manifested in the form of a new precarious “balance of financial fear.” On the one hand the Chinese Central Bank tries to avoid a sudden devaluation of the dollar that would translate into a colossal loss of the

value of its enormous reserves and investments in the US currency: it has been calculated that a revaluation of the renminbi against the dollar of 30 per cent would mean China losing capital equivalent to 10 per cent of its GDP. On the other hand, the US Treasury is counting on the possibility of continuing to sell its bonds to the Asian countries, to be able to cover the American worrying and growing twin deficit — that is a federal budget deficit with a simultaneous current account deficit — without having to resort to unpopular and draconian measures.

Europe, not having any continent-wide strategy and certainly not being able to carry out a foreign policy towards the Asian world based simply on the expansion of the European Union, is destined to remain at the mercy of the result of the contest between the USA and China. One only needs to consider that if the Chinese government continues its strategy of diluting, over a twenty or so year period, the absorption into industrial production of the labour currently underemployed mainly in the countryside, this will allow the entry into the labour market every two years of a new labour force as large as that already employed in countries like France or Italy. This is a process of unprecedented scale, but whose nature, it seems, should be well-known to Europeans, since something similar allowed them to pursue post-war reconstruction and development under the umbrella of the dollar.

In the Sixties, Jacques Rueff, former deputy governor of the Bank of France, thus summarised the financial relations between Europeans and Americans: “When a country with a key currency has a deficit in its balance of payment — that is to say, the United States, for example — it pays the creditor country dollars, which end up with its central bank. But the dollars are of no use in Bonn, or in Tokyo, or in Paris. The very same day, they are all re-lent to the New York money market, so that they return to their place of origin... If I had an agreement with my tailor that whatever money I pay him he returns to me the very same day as a loan, I would have no objection at all to ordering more suits from him.”² In short this is what is happening now between the USA and Asia. In the Sixties Rueff, General de Gaulle’s economic adviser, not being able to see any way out at the European level, and wishing to maintain French national sovereignty, proposed an unrealistic return to the gold standard as a way of releasing the European economies from the dollar. Today Europeans do have an instrument and, according to some, this is already in operation. The Euro is in fact increasing its weight in the reserves of central banks, and Russia is prepared to have its oil paid for in Euros. Nevertheless the timid rise of the Euro does not depend on its force and credibility as a

reserve currency, but on the fact that the enormous reserves of dollars accumulated by the Asian central banks (estimated to be about 1800 billion dollars in 2004, of which almost a third are held by the Chinese Central Bank) are beginning to be a source of growing preoccupation in view of a feared devaluation of the dollar. This is how the decision taken by the Chinese Central Bank last year to reduce its reserves in dollars from 80 to 75 per cent should be interpreted, as it diversified the remainder into euros, Swiss francs, pounds and yen. In any case the set up of the so-called Bretton Woods 2 centred on the dollar-renminbi relationship, will not be influenced by the Euro because there is no power behind the European currency. Everyone is waiting for a rupture of the fragile monetary balance that has been established between the dollar and the renminbi, either due to the explosion of uncontrollable social and economic demands triggered by the tumultuous and contradictory domestic development that are forcing the Beijing government to change its international policy, or due to a crisis of trust towards the dollar and American policy.³ At the same time everyone is hoping that the next monetary crisis will have a soft landing as well as hoping for spontaneous and coordinated international policies to be implemented to set more secure and stable exchange rate relations between the currencies.

But in this framework the European Union does not seem to have any power of influence over the course of events, and can only watch and wait. This is the result of the lack of a credible European monetary and economic government.

3. How Can we Make Europe a Player Once Again?

What credibility does a monetary union have without a State? How long can it last? Can we limit ourselves to governing what we have, asking for the budget of the Union to be increased a little and trying to appeal to the application of strategies born around the cooperation of a few States (like that of the Delors plan and the Growth and Stability Pact of the Nineties, or like the Lisbon strategy in this millennium)? Is it possible to transform the European Commission into a true European government through a simple reform of the Treaties? Or should we still be trying to tackle and resolve the issue of creating a new framework of power from which to govern the budget, fiscal policies, development plans and the setting of regulations?

Ostensibly these are questions that up to now Eurosceptic and anti-federalists have been most serious about asking, but which people who

demand more Europe should also begin to seriously ask themselves.

One only needs to make a rapid analysis of the state of European economic and monetary union to understand that its survival hangs by a thread. Moreover, the only known example of a successful monetary union – ironically recalled in the report by the British Treasury drawn up in 2003 to provide an opinion on the existence or otherwise of conditions for Britain's entry into the euro — is the one initiated and consolidated in the United States of America.⁴ It is not a case of drawing a mechanical parallel between the evolution time of the monetary and economic institutions of the USA and those of Europe. It is difficult to give a precise date for the start of monetary union in the USA by referring purely to descriptions of individual institutions and policies. Many of the features of the current European Monetary Union were not even present in America before the reform of the Federal Reserve in 1935. But nobody can say America did not have a monetary, fiscal and economic policy prior to that year. Granted that the evolution of the instruments of monetary, fiscal and economic policy management (i.e. the government of the economy) in North America, happened gradually and in response to specific requirements and crises, but it was born and developed within a continental federal state framework that allowed the formation and expression of a political will adapted to first establishing, then consolidating and then projecting all the instruments for governing monetary and economic union to the rest of the world over the course of the last century. And the secret of this success ultimately lies in the fact that, thanks to the federal system, the action of such a government started out and remained directly linked to the citizens and not to the member states of the Federation. The dollar, the Federal Reserve, the fiscal and budget policy, development and innovation policies, for better and for worse, are still perceived as being the expression of the will of the American citizens and not of the member states of the American Federation.

Such a framework of power and a direct link between continental federal government and citizens is quite far from being a reality in Europe.

All this should lead us to reflect on the impossibility of separating the issue of creating a continental federal government of the economy from that of creating a European Federal State: more specifically we cannot establish the former without first having created the latter.

Building the European Federal State is therefore the first aim for all those Europeans that on the one hand are becoming aware of the great changes underway as a result of the entry into world history of the forces

unleashed by Asia, and that on the other are becoming increasingly aware of the need to create a more balanced and just multipolar world. But in order to set off along this road, they must firstly decide as soon as possible why (i.e. to promote which values), and with whom (i.e. between which countries of the European Union) they must begin to build it.

Franco Spoltore

NOTES

¹ See the studies by Dooley, Folkerts-Landau, Garber, documented in *An Essay on the Revived Bretton Woods System*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper, September 2003, Cambridge MA 02138. The same authors subsequently updated their analysis in *The revived Bretton Woods System: The Effects of Periphery Intervention and Reserve Management on Interest Rates and Exchange Rates in Center Countries*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 10332, March 2004, Cambridge MA.

² Jacques Rueff, Fred Hirsch, *The Role and the Rule of Gold: An Argument*, Princeton UP, 1965.

³ See both the intervention of the former US Treasury Secretary, Lawrence H. Summers, *The U. S. Current Account Deficit and the Global Economy*, Peer Jacobsson Lecture, 3 October 2004, Washington, DC and of Roubini, Setser, *Will the Bretton Woods 2 Regime Unravel Soon? The Risk of a Hard Landing in 2005-2006*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper, First Draft, February 2005, Cambridge MA.

⁴ See the study carried out by the British Treasury on *The United States as a Monetary Union*, Stationery Office, Norwich, 2003.

Thirty Years Ago

THE ROLE OF THE INSTITUTIONS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR EUROPE*

FRANCESCO ROSSOLILLO

I

The existence of the Federalist Movement can be justified on the basis of a certain idea about relations between political institutions — i.e. between the mechanisms that regulate the struggle for power and the decision-making process¹ — and civil society. My aim in this essay is to make this idea explicit and to highlight the consequences that arise in order to define the crucial terms of our strategy.

The problem is therefore not only theoretical. In the internal debate of the Movement there are recurring disagreements on fundamental strategic orientations. Periodically it is argued whether the foundation of the European Federation should be considered our only strategic objective; when it comes to choosing its means the Movement is accused of “institutionalism.” The concept of “the European people” as a protagonist of the process of integration and as the ultimate term of reference of our action is also questioned.

All these problems are strictly linked with that of the relationship between political institutions and civil society. This debate is therefore of immediate importance to the political debate within the Movement. This essay will therefore address firstly the fundamental problem and subsequently its repercussions on three essential elements of our strategy, the objective, the means and the political front.

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II

The institutions, in so far as they do not only exist on paper, but actually work, are the rules of the game of political life, that is the channels through which the demands emerging in civil society from the dialectic of classes, ranks, groups and individuals take the specific and conscious form of political choices, guided as such by an orientation of values. This means that these same demands go from being generic social issues to being precise political issues, i.e. elements of a situation of power. A specific institutional order therefore defines the permanent aspect of a situation of power, and it does so both in terms of its structure (regime), and with respect to its spatial ambit (community).

In normal political life, struggles develop within the framework of existing institutions, which set out their rules themselves and allow alternative choices to emerge, under the drive of social forces, around which the conflict develops. The institutional order as such is therefore not a subject of debate in the political struggle, it is accepted by the parties in conflict.

This means that, in normal political life, the institutional order is supported by the consensus of all competing political forces within its framework, and therefore by the vast majority of social forces whose demands the former mediate. Often it is an implicit consensus, precisely because it is general, while the energies of political forces and the attention of public opinion are polarised by the issues of the conflict. But this makes it no less real.

A functioning institutional order therefore reflects the fact that the political and social forces confronting each other within its framework each recognise the other's legitimacy to exist as such. This means that each of them recognises, in principle, the legitimacy of those values specifically held by the others. The institutional order therefore delimits the sphere of the social values shared by all the components of society, and as such removed from the political struggle. These are the values underlying the coexistence of a social body.

The *general consensus* is therefore the social foundation supporting the institutions. It is the distinguishing element of the political struggle inside the State — the institution of institutions — from war among States, to the extent to which the former involves only part of the values of a particular social body — those not materialised in the institutional order — while the latter involves the very physical existence of the societies involved.

When the general consensus starts to fail we have a *crisis of institutions*. This happens when the evolution of the means of production instils in civil society new ideals, needs and ferments that the existing institutional order is no longer able to transform into political choices. This may happen both because within civil society new productive forces emerge which are then structurally excluded by existing institutions from the political struggle — and in this case it is the regime that enters into crisis because the spatial ambit in which the social forces interact and consequently in which new organisational needs emerge is broadened, while the institutional order remains limited to its primordial size. In this case we have a crisis of community. It goes without saying that the second hypothesis is more radical than the first, since crisis of community also means crisis of regime (where “regime”, in this context, does not have the abstract connotation of democratic or dictatorial regime, etc., but the concrete significance of the specific power structure overwhelmed by the crisis); whilst it does not work the other way round.

The crisis of the institutional order is also always, by its very nature, a crisis of the values underlying civil coexistence. The inability of the institutions to express the real needs of civil society results in political debate losing touch with reality and pointing to false alternatives. On the other hand, the same demands arising in civil society, because they cannot be expressed through the existing institutional channels and enter into the political debate, remain frustrated and debased. Any impulses towards renewal then become blind anarchic convulsions. The need for order and discipline degenerates into repressive and brutally authoritarian outbursts.

This situation continues until the conditions for general consensus are again created towards an alternative institutional order, able to translate the new social reality into political terms. The moments in history when these conditions reform are *revolutionary moments*. Every revolution is therefore the drafting of a new social contract, through which a people can reformulate the fundamental rules of their coexistence.

Revolutions are the moments in which civil society becomes conscious, in the institutions it forms for itself, of the transformations it has undergone. Therefore they are always made with the consensus of the vast majority of the people, against the resistance of a last, small reactionary fringe, taking refuge in the old institutional order. This fact is often mystified by a historiography that would like to portray every revolution as a civil war, but whose verity resonates with each of the great revolutions of the past. Moreover, if it is true that an institutional order

defines a situation of power, it is also true that the social groups excluded from it are excluded from power, and therefore also from the power to produce changes in the institutions. This change can only happen when the crisis of consensus involves the very social groups holding power.

By transforming the institutions and allowing the new needs that have grown in society to be expressed and to be translated into political choices, a revolution always entails an irruption of new values into history. These same ferments, apprehensions and aspirations that in the old framework could only be expressed by blind anarchic convulsions putting the whole social fabric into crisis, in the new scheme of things become the material basis for a new system of values. This is why the great revolutions of the past, despite all having had the immediate result of an institutional transformation, have also been the moments in history when modern man has radically reformulated his image of himself as a social being.

III

These considerations already provide an answer to the problem of determining the strategic objective of our struggle. When faced with the reality of a crisis such as the one European States are experiencing, the problem anyone wanting to overcome it has to resolve can be put in these terms. It means identifying the nature of the crisis, i.e. the way in which the separation between civil society and institutional order is played out; and consequently identifying the institutional transformation needed to redress this.

To rave on, like some of our friends do, about plans for the global transformation of society is a sign of a radical incomprehension of the multiform and unpredictable ways in which humanity matures in the course of history. Society, Proudhon used to say, may only transform itself thanks to the daily efforts of each member, thanks to artistic creation, scientific production, technological innovation, moral leaps, religious sentiments, in a word thanks to the infinitely varied forms in which life manifests itself and which never lets itself be hemmed in by the confines of schemes invented by third-rate demiurges. This also goes for authoritarian regimes; they may restrain or slow down the spontaneous evolution of society, but when they appear to be driving it forward, they are in fact merely guiding a movement that originates in the independent motivations of civil society.

The federalist hypothesis was born and kept alive precisely by

acknowledging that European society changed, and is still changing and that its change was so profound as to make the institutional structure of the nation state radically inadequate for expressing its needs. This is the root of the profound political crisis in which Europe finds itself today, also a profound crisis of values. For this reason federalists have identified their task as a struggle to reach beyond the nation state and to found the European Federation.

Of course it remains true that inside every institutional structure there are still alternatives of government, some of which are preferable to others. It remains true that within the European federal framework the conflict between parties will spring up again; the dialectic between party of order and party of movement. What is not true, on the other hand, is that this banal observation necessarily involves even the slightest revision of the definition of our strategic objective. This is the view of those who maintain that the federal solution in Europe should be considered desirable only on the condition that a specific sector of the political spectrum can monopolise the new institutional structure.

If it is true, as indeed it is, that the historically crucial contradiction today in Europe is that between the European dimension of the problems and the national dimension of the institutions, it is also true that, referring back to the well-known sentence of the *Ventotene Manifesto* again, the alternative between progress and reaction today in Europe can be identified with the alternative between European unification and preservation of the nation state.

Within this choice all the fundamental values at the basis of European civilisation are at stake, and thus its very survival. In the face of the immense historical importance of this alternative, government choices will be present in the new institutional framework which, from a historical perspective, and despite how much it may shock some of our friends, may have only the most insignificant nuances.

Moreover, among the values at stake in the choice for Europe, there is also that of democracy. One of the fundamental convictions justifying the existence of the Federalist Movement is that democracy in Europe only has a future in a federal framework. The principle that founds democracy is however that the welfare and progress of civil society are promoted to the greatest degree by the alternation of the parties in power. Acknowledging this involves acknowledging that all the parties — apart from those of course that aim to destroy democracy — have a right to citizenship in the political system and they have a positive role to play. This in turn means that the peaceful development of social forces does not

depend on the predominance of one party over the other, but rather on the balance between the parties, as shown by the history of the greatest western democracy, the British one.

The truth is that today the nation state frustrates both the great liberal values of the rule of law, the public spirit, autonomy from power, and the great socialist values of social progress, equality, the emancipation of the proletariat. Furthermore the battles between right and left wings do not have a content that is defined once and for all, but their contents and values vary according to the concrete historical situation in which they develop. What is at stake in the struggle for Europe is the objective of creating a new platform that gives the right wing something worth conserving and the left wing concrete prospects of renewal, i.e. that brings back a real meaning to the values of both.

The only chance of being able to negate this conclusion theoretically is to deny that today in Europe the contradiction between the European dimension of the problems and the national dimension of the institutions is the fundamental contradiction. Or to affirm that there are also other contradictions just as crucial and that, because they are independent from that between the nations and Europe, denote other fronts and other alliances. But in the former case one departs from the federalist hypothesis; and in the latter one condemns one's struggle to failure *a priori*. By attributing them with contradictory objectives, one splits the alliance of one's allies and reinforces that of one's enemies.

Anyone who wants to remain coherently within the fold of the federalist hypothesis must therefore recognise that the only strategic objective of our struggle is the foundation of the European federation.

IV

Let us now address the issue of means. The nature of the means a revolutionary movement must have to employ is defined by the particular character of the contradiction that characterises the revolutionary situation as such.

We have seen that the needs and ferments that develop in civil society from the dialectics of its components take the precise form of political choices. They therefore become the political will, only if, and to the extent to which they are mediated by a suitable institutional order. We have also seen that what characterises a revolutionary situation is the loss of correspondence between civil society and institutions; and that consequently, the strategic objective of every authentic revolutionary exploit

is to carry out an institutional transformation that restores correspondences on a higher plane.

The accomplishment of this transformation however requires a precise political will to take shape, i.e. the implicit general consensus for the new institutional order that develops spontaneously in revolutionary situations has to become conscious, a precise choice must be outlined.

The contradiction lies in the following. If a generic widespread state of mind becomes political will only in the presence of suitable institutions, the political will that needs to be emanated in order to realise the institutional transformation presupposes the existence of those same institutions whose creation it needs in order to be formed.

This could seem to be an absolute contradiction if the great revolutions of the past — and our own experience — did not show us quite clearly that in history there is also room for liberty to spring forth. It is however essential to keep in mind their terms because without this awareness no revolutionary strategy can succeed.

Let us therefore, in light of all this, try to identify the specific “logic of the situation” in which we find a movement aiming to create a transformation of the institutional framework, by comparing it with that in which parties normally work.

The situation in which a party working in a specific institutional framework has to develop its strategy presents two constants. The first is the fact that, in so far as it does not question the framework of political struggle — reflecting, as we have seen, on the values of the social life of general consensus — it tries to interpret conflicting demands, i.e. those that concern the interests and values of one part of the electorate against the interests and values of another part. The second is the fact that the existing institutions — through the electoral mechanism — allow the consensus of the party to be immediately transformed into power.

It follows that, in the strategy of a party, *there is a substantial coincidence between the time of the recruitment of forces and that of their employment*. The electoral strategy of a party is therefore played out in the attempt of widening its base of consensus among the electorate as far as possible, disseminating its “contents” and making them attractive to the largest possible number of voters. Having reached this objective, the rest flows naturally, as consensus is transformed immediately into votes, and votes into power. There is, in a certain sense, an identification of strategy and propaganda.

The constant factors of the situation in which a movement, trying to create a new political framework of struggle, has to work out its strategy

are contrary to the ones that precede it. Firstly, as we have seen, a battle seeking institutional transformation — in so far as it is historically justified — presupposes the existence of an almost universal consensus — even if only a virtual one — for the objective it wishes to achieve. Secondly, the very nature of the revolutionary struggle — in so far as it cannot fit into existing institutions, but remains outside of them — does not provide its actors with a pre-existing mechanism able to transform consensus into power, i.e. transforms it from virtual to real. It follows that in the strategy of a movement trying to transform the institutional order, *there is a radical separation between the time of the garnering recruitment of forces and that of their employment.*

The issue of the garnering recruitment of forces is not in fact an issue of the extent of consensus, but of the recruitment of militants. By this I mean a limited number of people able to perceive the real terms of the fundamental historical alternative without the mediation of suitable institutions and therefore take the responsibility of playing the role that in revolutionary moments is reserved for liberty.

It is easy to see how this issue is addressed in radically different terms from those that relate to a party. On the one hand it presents itself as the natural interpreter of some of the demands emerging spontaneously from the existing framework of struggle and, on the other hand, it is able to offer its activist militants the prospect of a normal career and the hope of acquiring positions of power, i.e. its system of incentives is the natural product of the institutional order within which it acts.

A revolutionary movement has none of these incentives precisely because its purpose is to go beyond the institutional order producing them. Therefore, in order to recruit its activist militants, it must activate the autonomous motivations of the individual personality, i.e. the cultural and moral motivations. This can only happen when one understands the historically decisive character of the front on which the movement is aligned and that the choices the existing framework of struggle brings forth are merely pseudo-alternatives. This result is not obtained through political propaganda, but rather through a profound cultural elaboration that can make the profound historical forces that act on society visible and which can demystify the false objectives highlighted by an institutional order that has entered into conflict with them.

The terms in which the issue of the employment of forces is addressed are a completely different thing. Even in this context it is not simply a matter of generically widening the base of consensus, because, at least virtual consensus, is already acquired. A mechanism must be created

allowing consensus to be transformed from virtual to real, i.e. transformed into power.

On the basis of these elements we can identify the two necessary conditions by which we can escape the fundamental contradiction characterising every revolutionary situation. The first is the expression of an act of liberty i.e. the coming into existence of a group — inevitably small — capable of supporting the revolutionary alternative and expressing — even against the existing institutional order — that minimum of political will needed to start the process.

The second is the implementation of the method Albertini called *political-institutional gradualism*. It consists of an attempt to create intermediate institutions, for which at the beginning only a minimum of political will needs to be mobilised. Ones which in time act as multipliers of this will, progressively introducing the revolutionary alternative into the political balance, until the front is created along which all forces at play can line up.

All the actions of the Federalists since the beginning of their history — from the European Peoples' Congress, to the Census, the campaign for the unilateral elections of the European Parliament, the "Spinelli Plan," the campaign currently underway — can be explained and should be judged entirely from this perspective.

V

Lastly let us consider the concept of "the European people." The crisis that European states have been experiencing since the end of the Second World War is a crisis of community. Therefore it not only involves the regime, but the state as such. This means that the deepest layer of consensus linking civil society to the institutions has entered into crisis; that layer is not even questioned during crises of regime. This link defines the entity "the people."

Where there is a state there is a people and where there is a state in crisis there is a people in crisis. Now, in so far as we accept the axiom — that underlies federalism — that the boundary separating barbarity from civilisation is that which separates war from peace, and that there can only be peace where there is a State, it follows that the solidarity that makes a people a people is the bond underlying every other loyalism and turns political struggle into a source of values instead of a senseless civil war.

This means that, even when the conflicts within a political system become dramatic and take over the regime itself, if the issue of commu-

nity is not questioned, the split in society is never total. It does not eat into the deepest roots of coexistence, but is expressed within the framework of a more profound solidarity, taken for granted but no less strong for the fact that it is implicit.

It follows, for example, that to say that in the Nineteenth Century there was a French people is not to deny the reality of the class struggle in France. It does however mean that, beyond the internationalist terminology of one part of the working-class movement, the class struggle developed on the foundation of the common consciousness of belonging to a single exclusive political community. This consciousness was able to remain to a certain extent implicit as long as the French framework was not put into question by the evolution of the European equilibrium, i.e. as long as the conflict between the classes remained compatible with the consensus for the framework of struggle. But it became explicit and prevailed over the class struggle as soon as the threat of the First World War made the two attitudes irreconcilable.

It is true to say that this fundamental consensus has always had an ideological aspect throughout history, and since the French revolution has manifested itself in the form of the idea of nation. It was never therefore entirely autonomous and rational, that is to say entirely a consensus. Therefore the entity "the people," as it is presented today in history, corresponds only partially to its concept. It is not entirely a people, just as the state is not completely a state — which is at the same time both expression and foundation — to the extent to which it continues to present an aspect of power. A reality matching the concept will manifest itself only when — with the end of the division of the world into antagonistic nations — the power and ideology justifying it disappear from relations between men. The only State appropriate to the concept will be the World federation, and the only people suited to the concept will be humankind politically organised in the World federation.

Today, however, we are far from achieving this goal. We must therefore discount the separation of reality from the concept, and the ambiguity of the words that describe them both. What is nevertheless relevant for us is that ideology is the result of a compromise between the requirements of power and those of the social reality. Therefore it appears only where the social reality creates the conditions for its possibility. This means that all peoples throughout history — notwithstanding its ideological representation in the mind of its members — nevertheless correspond to a definite and real sphere of interdependency in human relations, and therefore to a sphere of effective solidarity, still remaining the only

foundation on the basis of which the conflict between classes, groups and individuals can set free social values.

The federalist struggle is founded on the awareness that in Western Europe the nation state as an exclusive political community has entered into a crisis, and that therefore the bonds identifying peoples as nations are dissolving, producing a crisis of all social values and the degeneration of political life. However it is also an awareness — albeit only virtually for the time being — that we are witnessing a general consensus for the foundation of the European Federation. A new people is being born, and the task of Federalists is to transform its existence from a virtual one into one conscious of itself. This is why the strategy of the struggle for Europe must not ignore the concept of *a European federal people in the making* as a protagonist of the process and an interlocutor of the federalist vanguard.

There are immediate implications for this conclusion when it comes to identifying the political forces upon which the federalist strategy has to draw. These forces are all those that represent, in its various components, the European federal people in the making, albeit with the distortions brought about by the national framework of struggle. Their destiny is to put some life back, in the European framework, into the dialectic between the values that have gone into building the greatness of the history of Europe: i.e. all the forces of the democratic spectrum. The only strategic enemy is fascism, i.e. the only force that is fuelled by the permanence of the national framework and is destined to be definitively uprooted once it is done away with.

VI

What is actually at the root of the inability to understand the crucial conditions of the strategy of the struggle for Europe is the inability to think outside the national framework.

It is an inability that can be explained by the nature of the revolutionary situation. The federalist battle is the only progressive one that can be waged today in Europe. But the existing institutional order is not made to present the alternative between nations and Europe as a political choice, and therefore to compel political forces to align themselves along this front. The same dialectic between progress and conservation is restricted, by the language of national politics, to the national framework, and therefore distorted as all values are. Therefore since federalists line up on a different front to the national political forces, they defy consolidated

classifications and do not have a recognised place on the political landscape. They are not recognised as forces for progress because recognising them as such would compel national political forces to recognise the struggle for Europe as being the most historically decisive battle of our time and therefore to recognise themselves as reactionaries, in so far as they do not deal with the European question. But in politics, as in daily life, one perceives only what is understood. This explains the fact that very often the political presence of Federalists is noted and then immediately forgotten in the political world, and is not even recorded in the media. The latter, finding itself with a less advantageous viewpoint and being, on average, of much lower intellectual and moral quality, tends to be even more careless than the former.

The fact remains that engaging in the struggle for Europe only makes sense when there is a perceived possibility of being able to make the front of domestic politics and that of European politics come together. The crisis of an institutional order characterising revolutionary phases brings about the crisis of the alliances that it forms. The strategy of federalists is precisely that of bringing the national political forces onto the front of the struggle for Europe.

When this objective is reached, however, the battle will be won. Before then the European front will be destined to appear sporadically on the horizon of daily politics only to be obliterated again by national choices. The presence of the Federalists will therefore be doomed, until the moment of deciding, to be an ambiguous one, a fringe element rather than a main component of the political equilibrium.

It is this very ambiguity, this lack of support to be had from recognition that some people see as a crisis of identity. They do not have the necessary autonomy to refuse the options that emerge from the existing framework of struggle, safe in the knowledge that the great political and social values of European civilisation can only be recovered in this way. So they allow themselves to be swallowed up again by the false national alternatives, in the hope of finding a reassuring place in the political equilibrium, and therefore a recognised identity.

The “contents” that people accuse the political line of the Movement of not being able to include are in reality the contents of the national political struggle. Our project can only succeed if we, loyal to the autonomist line of federalism, continue not to include them.

NOTE

¹In the rest of the essay I shall talk, for the sake of brevity, of “institutions.” But the term is used to indicate political institutions in the meaning detailed in the text and should not therefore be understood in the fuller sense of the word that includes any type of consolidated social behaviour.