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Experiences of the European Left

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Parties and Social Movements

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1. Building a pro-business Europe.

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

Indeed, which is the *general philosophy* guiding the economic actions of the European leaders. This philosophy, which directly represents the interests of the financial form of capital, is a monetarist and neo liberist one, based on “balanced public accounts” and on the “fight against inflation”, and it’s is above all realized in the "Maastricht criteria" and the "stability pact". Surely, the fight against inflation means something else in Latino America a great importance, given the hard structural problems which inflation generates in Brazil, Argentina and so on. But in Europe a partial inflation increase is a development condition, being strictly intertwined with Keynesian policies which assured European progress in the 50s – 80s. Nowadays the anti-inflation policies of European economic authorities are a true and real constraint which makes any consensual anti-cyclical public intervention - or even only changes which might mitigate some aspects of stagnation - impossible.

This is a philosophy which has no solid foundation at all from the point of view of economic analysis, whereas its political foundation is clear: the struggle against the public sector as a part of the more complex strategy directed towards weakening waged labour and forcing it towards over-exploitation. Therefore, the motives which lead the European leaders to maintain the restrictive criteria decided at Maastricht (which are sometimes escaped by the greater European countries, like Germany and France), have little in common with a development prospect. They have very much more in common with the immediate interests of the capitalists, concerning both industrial and financial capital, and with the aim of redefining the class relations to the advantage of the ruling classes. It’s important to emphasize that when I talk about the financial form of capital I don’t mean to refer to a certain group of “bad speculators” opposed to the “good and busy industrials”: the financial form of capital directly interest great industrial capital itself, because in periods of strong concurrence on the markets there’s a need for large masses of liquid money for industrial mergers and scientific research. Therefore there’s no hope in an alliance of the left with great industrial capital against financial capital: they’re, today more than ever, two faces of the same coin, even if strong contradictions could develop between these two forms of capital.

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

increase in public spending, would only aid the current industrial and financial system with its activities of mere intermediation and with its *labour saving* investment.

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

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

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

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

It must be said straight away that the constitution project confirms and reinforces the tendency to consider the European Union not as a federation, but as an institutional reality which only sees *intergovernmental* organisms as objects and protagonists. This considerably weakens the possibility of its presenting itself as a strong unified subject, especially from the point of view of external politics as we will see. Furthermore, during none of the decisive moments in the process of the formation of the European constitution is the intervention of the *demos* (people) planned. Above all, there is no constitutional assembly planned that is directly elected by the European citizens: Therefore, even a possible referendum, as an ultimate form of approval of the constitution, would at present only appear as a plebiscitary instrument and not as genuinely democratic.

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

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

Considering, then, the fundamental values which underlie the Constitutional project, the difference from constitutions resulting from World War II is apparent straight away. *Peace*

and *Labour*, values seen as fundamental by European constitutionalists as a reaction to the slaughter of 1939-1945, and as an expression of a dynamic compromise between different social classes, are subjugated to a strong change which adapts these two principles to the current phase of capitalism, based on permanent war and more precarious labour. Peace is no longer considered a fundamental value, but only a possible objective of the Union (I, 2), an objective subjected to opportunism and the political choices of those who make decisions.

Likewise the *right to work*, a central point in European politics in the years running up to 1980 approximately, is converted, in the era of neo-liberal globalisation, into the *right to be working*: it is therefore no longer an universal right but a mere capability of the individual. Therefore there is no longer a policy of full employment but a simple striving for an "elevated" level of employment, and the Union is only concerned with favouring the sale of workforce acting in the sphere of education, and the removal of obstacles to employment for single individuals (obstacles which are, as we know, nowadays nearly always identified by the excessive rigidity of salaries and norms).

In a constitution which, in contrast to the fundamental ideas of modern constitutionalism, does not practically define any limit of action of the governments and is practically open to all demands resulting from estimations of political opportunities, the only constraint which is really defined in a clear mode is *neo-liberal monetarism*. The general philosophy referred to above, which inspired the Maastricht criteria and the stability pact, practically turns into a *constitutional norm*. The articles 66, 67, 68, 73, and 74 of part III of the Constitution project assume price stability, market economy, free competition, budget constraints, and the fight against inflation as principles of the Union. The re-activation of even a moderate Keynesianism becomes juristically impossible within the Union.

But there is worse to come: even the dismantling of public services is assuming constitutional range: following a rigorous subsidiary principle, all basic public services have now to be confirmed, primarily, by the market. The "public hand" is left only with the services granted to the poorest citizens, according to the concept of *residual welfare*, which completely redirects the provisions of the welfare state away from the original concept of guaranteeing the basic rights of *all* citizens.

In short, the institutional form of the European Union seems to be purposely made to disillusion the most convinced supporters of a federal Europe, whether they are the most attentive critics of the anti-democratic evolution of Western states, or those who saw Europe as a possible dam against neo-liberal politics, if not practically a base for the reversal of the fundamental tendencies of globalisation.

In reality it seems safe to say that this state *sui generis* does not contain any positive characteristic of the state (popular legitimacy, separation of powers, re-distributive function, universality of rights). However, it contains all the negative aspects that the state has acquired and aggravated in the era of neo-liberalism: independence of executives and bureaucracies, re-distributive functions to the advantage of the ruling classes and not the popular classes, and closure of borders to migrants.

The limits of Europe's constitutional architecture reflect the limits of Europe as a political subject, i.e. as an entity capable of speaking - at least through the necessary mediations - as a single voice, and of acting as a efficient subject above all outside its borders.

It can be said, at least until the second war in Iraq, that European politics did not deviate completely from the principle lines of US politics, thus showing an incapability of being able to understand all consequences of the *direction* of US strategy. A strategy driven to fight Serbia yesterday, Iraq today, Iran tomorrow, and always with the final aim of creating geopolitical conditions which prevent either Europe, Russia or China from becoming a

political-economic power to an extent which could efficiently confront US power. A strategy which, amongst other things, is never hidden and can easily be documented by all the declarations of intent often raised by the *establishment* in North America. It is obviously impossible that the European leaders are unaware of this strategy. With the exception of European governments which are candidates for the role of a permanent vassal of the US (like the Blair and Berlusconi administrations), it is clear that the others have chosen to support the line of the White House in the name of immediate economic and political interests, sacrificing long-term interests.

The first war against Iraq could have had the aim of trying to gain an influence over oil supplies. The war against Serbia was obviously motivated (beyond the "humanitarian" pretext which could only fool those who wanted to be deceived) by the claim to ultimately unravel former Yugoslavia in order to increase the "Mark area" and increase German political influence towards the East. Generally speaking, the interconnection of the different capital fractions on the two sides of the Atlantic, and the mutual interests in economic development of both poles of the relationship (US and European Union) prevent the acknowledgement - *up to a certain point* - of the potential and real conflict between two social-economic systems which still remain distinct and competitive. This "point" was momentarily overcome during the second war in Iraq. In this case it was clear that the US choice (and the insistence on disregarding the UN position) meant that the US wanted to be free to make whichever decision of war it chose in the present and future, intervening at will in any geopolitical conjuncture with essentially only US interests in mind.

The war in Iraq, in particular, evoked opposition from France, Germany and Russia because of the situation of permanent occupation it meant, the stable control of the country's oil it secured for the US, the fact that it established a wedge in the flank of Russia and an outpost for a possible war on Iran. However, this opposition, the first sign of rupture in the system of alliances arising from World War II and developing after the collapse of the USSR, has so far only served to make a problem apparent without providing the instruments to solve it. Russia quickly left the axis of Paris and Berlin, and the two European capitals soon found themselves substantially isolated in relation to the other capitals of the Union, all - some more, some less - lined up in support of the US. Therefore, *the first sign of European autonomy was also the sign of a possible rupture of the European Union*: once again, a political decision of high importance was not taken by the Union, but by single states, even if they are states of great power within the Union.

The contradiction, of course, has not been healed, and will reappear. However, it is not easy to estimate the short or medium-term formation of a common European approach in contrast to that of the US, and this has at least two causes. First of all, the same Franco-German axis is not quite stable and secure, due to persisting differences on the Union's agricultural policies, on the extent and use of the structural funds, on the strictness of the budget (more important for Germany than for France), and on the relevance of the votes in the Council. Secondly, and this is more important, the next (2004) EU enlargement to include Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta is likely to aggravate the disintegration of Europe in matters of external politics under these conditions. These states, above all Poland, which were former satellites of the Soviet Empire, show a sharp tendency towards a military alliance with the US, a tendency which made some commentators ask: "Are we enlarging Europe or the US?"

Now, the event of the EU enlargement towards the East, strongly pushed by Germany, clearly shows that the immediate economic objective (enlargement of the European market and of the sphere of influence of German industry) was considered more important than its possible political consequences. Therefore, the existence of Europe as an autonomous political subject is obviously only considered a valid objective as long as it immediately serves the economic

interests of the countries concerned. Once again, the construction of Europe appears to have moved more by economic intentions than political ones. The enlargement of the Union renders autonomous external policy even more difficult, as does adding some states to the European community that have little inclination to cede their own authority to supranational bodies, due to past experiences of domination by the USSR. This increases the distance towards the prospect of a Europe capable of being a player in world politics.

Thus it seems that's right to say that only a strong left-oriented and movement-based action could reverse the construction of a pro-business Europe, allowing Europe to be a complete political subject in face of US, and building an alliance with other states or groups of states, like Brazil, which try to escape the borders of capitalistic globalization.

2. The transformation of the moderate left

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

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

The opposition to the second war on Iraq by a large part of the moderate left should certainly be considered as an important phenomenon, which could open a new phase of European politics if it were to be repeated in the face of other US military adventures. However, it is legitimate to ask whether and how much this opposition is based on a strategic choice and an exact understanding of the US strategy, or whether it more likely results from the fact that the majority of the parties of the moderate left, at the beginning of the war, did not have a part to play in government.

However, identification of the moderate European left with the Union's current political course has not only emerged in the face of war; it is also emphatically noticeable with respect to social and institutional decisions. In most cases, the neo-liberal doctrine is approved with conviction: the Italian Massimo D'Alema - leading exponent of the Democratici di Sinistra (Left Democrats) - signed a manifesto together with Tony Blair which describes the politics of *workfare* as being desirable. Even the constitutional architecture of Europe is not really being discussed or criticized by the moderate left. The current draft of the constitution is sometimes considered "insufficient"; however, there is no criticism of the non-democratic character of the constitution's defining process, and of the structure of the relations between the parliament and the executive.

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

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

party. The first has the main task of contributing to the formation of lower classes' culture and to select, within these classes, leading groups as an alternative to the dominant groups. The second has the function of an electoral machine that supports the election of a leading group whose creation does not occur, or does not necessarily occur, within the party or within people. More recently, following the transformation of the election campaigns (more personalized and increasingly carried out in the television *media*); the mass electoral party has become unwieldy and useless. The efforts of thousands of party members is of less value (or so they think) than the work of one single public relations agency. The electoral mass party is substituted by the "light" party. Its election resources are invested mainly in electoral technologies and not in members. This is also a *labour saving* investment, related to a decrease in political participation and an accentuated social distance between the candidates and the members.

Nowadays, the candidates coming from the party itself are selected mainly according to their electoral *appeal* and not to their ideological loyalty, their class origin or their connection to experiences of social mobilisations. In a large proportion of the cases, the candidates do not even come from the party anymore; they are chosen from the ranks of public administration, technocrats, and above all entrepreneurs and *managers*. Quite often they are entrepreneurs and managers from consulting agencies, service companies, and the labour market agencies who have a vested interest in *deregulation* and precarious labour. Therefore, the personnel of the left are chosen without giving any attention to their relation to the popular base, and even if not directly fashioned by capitalist entrepreneurs, the left is still formed by individuals whose main mission is to win the elections: a mission which favours a political culture which is only capable of *adapting* to social processes and not *intervening* to transform them.

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

In the majority of cases, the loss of identity within the European moderate left is therefore not due to an erroneous sense of reality, to a temporary loss of memory. It is not a purely *ideal* phenomenon but a *social* phenomenon, and therefore it is much more difficult to overcome. Although rooted in social conditions, as we have seen, the process of transformation of moderate left has at least also an important ideological cause: the belief in the link between economic development and social progress.

Social progress has been often identified by social-democracies with the redistribution of the wealth produced by capitalism. Such an assumption has given good results in the years '50s - '70s, when economic development meant mass production, continuous job creation, wage increasing and keynesian policies. Those years created the illusion that any form of economic development is good for lower classes: but this is a mistake. Also in the '50s - '70s the partial redistribution of wealth in favour of lower classes wasn't the result of the mere economic development, but of the great wave of class struggle and of the contribution of working classes in smashing fascism and nazism. And such a partial redistribution didn't really affect the power of ruling classes in production and in the state.

And above all in the last decades economic development is not synonymous with social progress. Nowadays, in the actual form of capitalism, any productivity increase means more exploitation and more unemployment. Social democracies, and often also Trade Unions, accept to sacrifice social equality hoping that economic development will give the means for a future diminution of inequality. But increasing economic production means nowadays increasing social disease, individualism, class fragmentation. Tomorrow there will be nobody able to fight for an equal distribution of social wealth. Tomorrow is too late: if future is only

conceived as a result of economic development and of a weak political intervention, there will be no future but capitalism, poverty and unemployment.

Thus, the request for an economic development is nowadays an ambiguous one if it's not specified what kind of development we want. For social democracies, which have in many cases abandoned any idea of public intervention on economy, economic development means almost to let corporations do what they want.

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

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

Thus I think that the approach of left wing parties to the problem of unity with moderate left should be a tactical and not a strategic one. Unity is one of the faces of a struggle which result will be the hegemony either of moderate or of radical left, and not a final large agreement between them.

Two questions in conclusion: Is the transformation of moderate left irreversible? Was such a transformation unavoidable?

I think that the transformation is irreversible, because it's a transformation of the core of parties: i.e. of the relationship among organization, culture and social classes. By this time organization and culture of moderate left prevent lower classes from becoming ruling classes within parties or out of them or, at least, it prevents them from influencing the most important choices of parties. There's been a sociological and also anthropological mutation and, by now, often trade unions and even the Churches are surely involved in lower classes more than socialdemocratic parties.

This relevant mutation doesn't mean that in any socialdemocratic party all leaders and all militants changed their cultural and political values. A strong inner opposition to the parties' shift to the right often rises. But the mutation means that the victory of such an opposition – if possible – involves a radical rupture with the present majority and the present structure of the parties.

But I think that such a mutation of the moderate left was not unavoidable, or, at least, was not the result of an historical and social law. There are, surely, inner causes which urge socialdemocracies to their transformation. And these causes, as we have seen, are above all the relationship with the state and the ideology of economic progress. But these inner causes may produce a real mutation only with the influence of other, external causes, and that is:

- 1) A strong economic development which makes a good satisfaction of much of the expectations of lower classes possible.
- 2) A particular structure of the state which allows lower classes and their representative parties to play an active role and not only a role of opposition.
- 3) The fact that ruling classes feel the necessity and/or the usefulness of a wide and lasting compromise with lower classes and their representatives.
- 4) The absence of strong and believable competitors, that is the absence of other political groups able to organize the political alternatives which rise during the process of transformation of the moderate left.

In the European history of years '50-'80 all these conditions were presents. And when the first three conditions vanished, the transformation of the left was already complete, and thus left parties, instead of opposing the new liberist deal, agreed with it.

Surely these conditions are now weak or absent in Europe, and possible new political groups of lower classes, although moderate, will be not easily co-opted in a new improbable compromise with corporations and the state: neither corporations nor the state need such a compromise today.

And I think that these conditions are now absent in Latino America, and that the obvious risk of a transformation of the latino american left will not necessarily lead to a real mutation of its nature and role.

The key points of the new situation are: the rupture of the link between economical development and social progress; the transformation of the states, which are more and more unable to open themselves to the popular masses; the fact that ruling classes don't want any kind of long-lasting pact with lower classes; the presence of a multi-actorial movement in which not only political party has a political role and, above all, there's no hegemonic organization, so that the possible cooptation of one of the movement's components (a party, a set of social organizations and so on), could be easier contrasted by another part of the movement itself.

3. Problems of European Radical Left.

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

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

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

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

Furthermore, along with these objective difficulties, there are also several problems which derive from the process of formation of the radical left, of its ideology and the organisational forms it has given itself.

In fact, each one of radical left parties either has a history which is quite distinct from the others or is the fruit of encounters between different experiences which are not yet balanced between each other. Among the parties of the radical left, there are historical experiences and cultural sensitivities which are very heterogeneous. Some parties are the result of the transformation of communist parties which held power in this or that state of the "socialist" block, some are the outcome of the transformation and frictions in western communist parties, and still others are the result of the merger between ex-communists and the social-democratic or green left, and some are preserving the experience of the new left in the 70s and the pacifist movement in the following decade. Quite often, each of these parties maintains all these various orientations internally, to greater or less degrees. The reason for the encounter between these different cultural and political components can be found in the severe crisis of the left and the clear choice made by the moderate left for the neo-liberal field. These factors have forced all anti-capitalist groups to look for a convergence terrain and to try and produce new cultural politics. But it's still a long way.

Up until now, convergence and political innovation do not seem to have brought the hoped-for gains. Even if at this time we can see some countertendencies, parties we are examining are in fact still profoundly divided, even within the GUE alliance, and this division is noticeable, first of all, in the differing standpoints towards the European Union. In fact, not all are convinced of the necessity of a strong Union and many prefer to give priority to a struggle on the national front, without putting together the effort necessary for constructing common action at European level.

As in the case of moderate left, a large part of the orientation of ideas of radical left can also be explained by material processes, relative to the status of political parties in their political system. In the majority of cases, parties traditionally understand working for socialism as an action essentially carried out at the state level, and in nearly all cases this opinion has been reinforced and is now part of the inherent identity of many parties, because their creation or their differentiation from the moderate left is actually based on the idea of protecting or developing the social state. However, the social state, in the concrete historical experience, is the nation state, whereas the construction of Europe with its contemporary loss of some of the competence of the nation states is identified by the weakening and dismantling of welfare. This explains the mistrust of many parties towards the European Union.

Another very important cause of the cultural mistrust towards the European Union is the political inefficiency of the location where the radical left parties mainly succeed in expressing their presence, i.e. the European Parliament. We have already seen how the European Parliament is a body with very little power compared to the Council or the Inter-governmental Conference. The initiatives undertaken at the parliamentary level alone are practically always symbolic gestures, and their immediate efficiency is very doubtful. Furthermore, the weakening of the parliaments compared to the governments is now a very broad and irreversible phenomenon and concerns all the nation states as well: therefore, the mistrust towards the European Parliament would coherently have to be extended to the mistrust towards parliamentary action in general. If instead we rightly maintain that the role of parliaments should be protected and strengthened, a common and coherent struggle would need to be fought on both the national and European level. Only within the European dimension would a new democracy, which would also focus on reactivating the role of parliament, be able to master the instruments of political economy capable of reconstructing the material foundations of democracy itself.

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

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

Perhaps also due to the strong European characteristic of the entire Italian political culture, the PRC realised immediately that the initiatives of the forces antagonistic to capitalism, within the massive tremor produced by globalisation, could only move efficiently on a continental scale. This intuition was not just formal, it was not just reduced to a few phrases in congress texts, and it conditioned the whole of PRC politics at its most important turning points. For instance, the support given by the PRC to the centre-left government led by Romano Prodi and the subsequent rupture (1998) with this government can also be explained in relation to the building of European Union. Up until the introduction of the single currency, the PRC accepted a series of restrictive policies, with huge efforts and great internal tensions, aimed at creating the conditions necessary for Italy to immediately participate in the Euro area. Hence the party treated the entry to European space as an objective which at least up to a certain point, justified the sacrifice of other actual objectives of the party. However, immediately after achieving this objective, the PRC made a request to start a new political phase, whereby the entry to Europe should signify the initiation of a relaunch of neo-Keynesian policies at the national and continental level. Having failed to receive any positive response to this demand, the PRC withdrew its support for the Prodi administration and started a strong polemic with the forces of the centre and the moderate left. This polemic became even more acute during the war against Serbia. This did not mean abandoning the European perspective, however, but the effort of finding other ways for the construction of a "Europe united in solidarity". These ways were first attempted with the action within the GUE and then, much more importantly, from 2000 onwards, with the opening towards the social movements, which started to strongly contest the decisions of all the supranational bodies. This meant immediate confrontation with the new form assumed by contemporary political power, which is no longer situated merely in the nation state but in the confluence of multiple decisional levels. Based also on this new, rich relation with the movements, the PRC again proposed actions on the European level and the formation of a new political subject, capable of bringing the best experiences from parties

and movements together and to work, on this basis, towards constructing an alternative Europe.

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

Therefore, the way out of the contradiction we have claimed above consists of opening towards all the social movements which are also facing the problem of the construction of modern Europe today. The *impasse* that parliamentary action is in (at the national and European level) could possibly be overcome with the creation of a synergy between the actions of parties and the actions of movements.

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

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

This transformation of the traditional concept of the political party is probably an essential condition for the development as well as for the survival of the parties of the radical left. In

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

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

4. The new social movement as a new pattern of political action.

In order to understand which could be the future of a new left, it's very important to understand the nature and the meaning of the new social movement which has risen in Seattle 1999 and has developed itself in Porto Alegre, Genoa and so on.

And it's important to understand that this movement is a very particular one and that its experience forces us to change our ancient idea of power, politics and social action.

First of all it is not simply "a movement", but it's the link between many movements, each of them concerning different areas of modern society. Movement is composed by many and different movements that before the end of this century never really had reciprocal relationships. It's composed by different actors which defend their difference but, at the same time try to build bridges among all the actors. Thus both plurality and the seeking for a new kind of unity are a part of the genetic code of such a movement. In the past the great mass movements like the peasants' or workers' ones were almost single-actor movements, in which unity seemed to be a starting point due to a common social nature. Now unity is a result and not a starting point, and it's not ever a complete and definitive unity: the components of the movement try to achieve a common action, but also *agree to disagree* about several items, without transforming any disagreement in an irreversible rupture. Such a plurality of actors is not only a factor which can increase democracy, as we will see, but also allows the building of a strategy able to face capital and the State in many and different social areas

Another difference with the past experiences is the fact that this movement is composed not only by spontaneous groups, but also by several organizations, the major part of which were existing before the movement arose. In the past, either a new movement destroyed the ancient organizations, or the existing organizations formed a great common organization to answer the movement's new problems. Now several previous organizations stay and grow inside the movement, new organizations (often "link organizations") rise besides of them and all together form a network which allows the movement to be a continuous one.

The continuity of this movement (which exist also when it seems to disappear because the network of organizations assures day by day the production of culture, knowledge and political projects which *then* appear on the public scene) depends also on another important fact.

XXIth century movement is a structural one, which existence is the consequence of the crisis both of the ancient form of communism and of the present form of capitalism. Movement is composed above all by three different kinds of organizations: 1) Single-campaign or civil action organizations, 2) Self-organized associations of workers, peasants and so on, 3) Non Governmental Organizations.

The single-campaign organizations rise up from the crisis of political parties, connected with the crisis of the great projects of a general social transformation. After the failure of state-communism, it's obvious that people's political action is, in a first moment, a single-issue action, and a not tomorrow - oriented but today – oriented one. Such an action allows many individuals to have political experiences even when the hope in a great transformation seems to fade away. However, the hard-capitalism of these days, with its monetarist and warfare politics, forces these organizations and these people to a new general project which is now rising from the real people's life and not from an ideological approach.

The workers' self-organizations are the answer to the crisis of capitalism and often of trade unions too. In many case, as in Argentina, Brazil, Africa or Asia, they are not only a particular form of political organization, but also an economic one. Self-organization often allows many people to survive, directly managing production and distribution, sometimes in a socialistic way. By this way self-organization is no more a task of some small and ideological left-wing group, but a necessity for many and many people, and thus it's possible that XXIth century will be above all the century of self-organizations, while XXth century was above all the century of parties and trade unions.

NGOs are a wide phenomenon, involving a very great number of people and mobilizing many financial resources. Someone says that they're day by day more important than many little or medium size states. Their increase is due to two factors: 1) the attempt of ruling classes to reduce or completely dismantle welfare state, also delegating to NGO many of the former public services; 2) the new form of commitment of many people which, unlike the militants of the Seventies and Eighties, haven't choose an immediately political form of action, but a social one. Even if many NGO have been and still are co-opted in the capitalistic and neo-liberist governance, the great part of them has been radicalised by the effect of the present form of capitalism which, by one side, asks these organization for a strong commitment in fighting social disease and, by the other side, worsens this disease and denies the financial resources to face it.

Thus the three main components of the movement's organizations are the effect of deep, structural shifts in society and not only a momentary phenomenon.

Many people, above all party people, say that movement is perhaps an important social reality but not a political one: but this is a serious mistake.

Surely, if you think that politics is something concerning only the state, the movement is not a political reality. But the defeat of state socialism and the incapability of welfare state to resist the capitalistic counter revolution, show that it's impossible to face capitalism acting only and above all within the state. The source of power stays in the organization of production, distribution, culture, gender roles and so on, and stays in the building of social identities in daily life. Thus, only if you're able to act in these areas you can face capitalism, and even if you want to act within the state you must start from the struggle within society and conceive your political action as a continuous movement between state and society.

The new social movement is rooted in the social areas, and just by this way it's a political movement.

Even if favourable to the movement, many people think that the relationship between movement and parties is a "question-answer" one: movement asks and demands, and parties

or politics answer. This is another serious mistake: in the great majority of cases parties and politics are unable to answer and not only because they've not financial resources enough, but because they don't know how to manage many problems, while the movement's associations do, being often formed by specialist and however by people acting directly in a particular area. The rise and development of a great number of NGO's, self organizations and so on is also the effect of an important and increasing structural phenomenon: the necessity of a specific form of knowledge in order to manage any specific social area.

Somebody may argue that, in any case, even if able to face the new social dimension of politics, the movement is unable to face the classical political problems. But this is the last great mistake.

For instance no left party in Europe, neither moderate nor left wing party, has been able to understand the political relevance of the European Constitution's project. Only movement as done it, first in Florence and then in Paris, contrasting this project with alternative projects, meetings, mass demonstrations. Several left wing parties joined movement on this issue only after. Thus we can say that, concerning this very important issue, movement has shown greater political intelligence than any party.

And, finally, only movement could have been able, in the past year, to mobilize a very great number of people against USA war: without movement's action, no moderate left party would have been involved against war and no left wing party could have been able to involve such a great number of people.

Surely, movement has at least two great problems concerning its political ability.

The first problem is how to avoid to be co-opted in capitalistic governance: and this is a problem, above all, of NGO.

The second problem is, at least in Europe, how to find a form of political action which is neither a pressure-group nor a party form; that is: how to be a complete political subject without reproducing the lobbies' and parties' experiences of a State-submitted politics.

But parties too have the same problems. They have been often co-opted in capitalistic state management and they're by this time unable to act as a complete political subject because of the weakness of their traditional strategies and of their social roots. Both parties and movement have nowadays to reshape their action, building a synergic pattern of political behaviour which has no more "bottom" and "top" but flexible and various kinds of intervention.

In conclusion I'd like to underline the two main points in which movement has produced an historical shift in political action:

1. Movement has shown that the roots of politics are not in the state but first of all in society, so that a new left strategy, even if concerning, of course, both society and the state, must give more importance to a continuous social work, which is the preliminary condition for a well-oriented action within the state.
2. Political action is no more a single-actor action. Movements, parties, trade unions and so on have the same political importance. In any time the main actor could be a either a party or a movement's organization and so on. Thus it's not enough to say that party must accept the importance of movement, it must also accept that, often, it's no more the leader or the only leader of the social and political coalition of left forces.

5. Democracy and the Left.

First of all we have to answer the following point: why is democracy so important for the Left?

My opinion is that democracy for the Left is not only a form of government (better than others, of course), and not only a long-term or mid-term task: democracy for the Left is also a way of building the subject of social and political transformation. Masses become really a social and political subject when they are involved in a self-empowerment process which enables them to rule in all spheres of society, and democracy is the way to such an empowerment.

The first question on democracy is: who is *demos*? And the second is: in how many spheres of society does this *demos* exert its power?

The Left first of all enlarged *demos*, including in this term all popular masses, and exceeding by that the limits of liberal democracies: universal vote right and welfare state are two intertwined forms of this first kind of democracy, which we call *representative democracy* because in such a kind of government and state people don't act directly, but by means of delegates: parliamentary representatives and public bureaucracy. Or, better, in this form of democracy masses act directly only by vote and by demonstrations, or strikes and so on, while the decision making process is managed by delegates. Thus representative democracy, which is undoubtedly a progress, may also - in particular conditions of economic development - enable the masses to manage their life, getting them used to delegate to representatives and bureaucracy their most important problems. Representative democracy is not synonymous with a wide popular democracy because its only arena is the parliament and the state, while a real empowerment of the masses involves their skill in taking directly decisions on other social spheres: culture, production and so on.

Traditionally social democratic parties (at least in Europe) have preferred representative democracy, often fighting against other mass experiences. But in the Seventies two other forms of democracy emerged as a claim and a practice of the new movements (civil society movements, student movements, but also working class movements): *direct democracy* and "local" or *self-governed democracy*. Although always intertwined, these two new forms of democracy have to be distinguished.

Direct democracy is a particular kind of *decision-making process*, while self-governed democracy is a particular kind of *social relationship*. An example of the first one is a referendum in which people decides to say "yes" or "not" to a law, without intermediations of delegates. An example of the second one is a workers' council in which workers try to imagine and to fight for a different and more egalitarian work organization. It's important to say that while self-governed democracy necessarily involves direct democracy, direct democracy doesn't involve self-governed democracy. It's impossible a different managing of social relationships without some kind of direct democracy, but it's possible to have a direct democracy which has no immediate influence on social relationships.

And it's also important to say that, if democracy is, above all, a way of building a social and political subject, self-governed democracy is, in some way, "more important" than direct democracy because in the collective experiences of self government, and of managing a new kind of social relationship, a new and more powerful social subject rises, which is able to improve direct democracy too, while the subject of direct democracy could be also a simple citizen or a simple television watcher.

Moreover, when I talk about "local" democracy I don't mean only the fact that self-governed democracy is a matter of geographically limited areas (a town, a district and so on), but particularly the fact that democracy invades many specific social areas and not only the

parliamentary or legislative one: areas, like production, school, gender divisions and so on, which were before considered as ruled by technique or nature. The great self-governing wave of the seventies arose in the critique of the “neutrality” of technologies, culture and gender divisions, which were seen as a product and a form of the capitalistic power.

In the Eighties and Nineties, self-governed democracy was defeated by the capitalistic counter-revolution, but also by the reaction of social-democracies, which in almost all the European countries were able to weaken and contrast a kind of political action dangerous for the political monopole of traditional parties and trade-unions. Some form of direct democracy was, on the contrary, co-opted by ruling classes as a mean of decision making, to give people the illusion that something changed in political life, and to generate plebiscitarian forms of decision.

But in the same years also representative democracy has known a deep transformation and crisis.

Because of the necessity of facing workers’ struggles, reducing public expenditures, and starting monetarist policies, ruling classes reduced in those years mass participation in representative democracy by means of: 1) a diminution of parliament power and an increase of government power; 2) a weakening of the structure and role of political parties, more and more reduced to a mere electoral machine and more and more submitted to the power of media (television above all); 3) the reinforcement of the “triangular pacts” among governments, corporations and more and more bureaucratic trade unions (a reinforcement which was the prelude to a successive rupture, when the balance of power became more favourable for corporations and the state).

Socialdemocratic parties, after having refused an alliance with the new social movements which could have renewed democracy, were unable to contrast such a process: on the contrary they often agreed with it, becoming in many case a protagonist of the weakening of representative democracy itself.

In Italy, for example, the former Italian Communist Party destroyed itself as a mass party, became more and more a “light” party ruled by professionals and managers, cut its roots in working classes, joined liberalism and committed itself in a transformation of the electoral system from a proportional to a majority-role one, producing by this way, the end of any autonomous although moderate political representation of workers.

Fortunately, the hope of a restore of democracy rises again, in the forms of direct and self-governed democracy, in the new social movement. This movements is strongly influenced, above all, by self-governed democracy, being composed, as we have seen, by a great number of associations: self-organized workers’ groups, communities and religious groups, Non Governmental Organizations of different kinds, self-organized agencies for single-issue political campaigns.

I’ve already spoken about the nature of such a movement, and so I’ll add only some remarks concerning its links with democracy.

First of all, the composite and pluralistic nature of the movement is not only a way for increasing political participation, and not only an important way of self-empowerment for individuals and lower classes. It also means an hope for the building of a democratic alternative to capitalism which doesn’t repeat the experience of state socialism. State socialism was also the effect of a political process which had only an actor: the political party. Thus, the result was an authoritarian state system, and a bureaucratic planned economy. We can think that now a political process played by a great number of actors could achieve a form of society which substitutes market economy with a social-oriented but pluralistic one.

Second, the new rising of direct and self-governed democracy doesn't mean the end or the definitive solution of democracy's question.

Many other problems start now:

- 1) What kind of link between these new forms of democracy and the ancient representative one?
- 2) What kind of link between a social-rooted democracy and the necessity to transform the inner state machine? If you want to "extinguish" the state as a separate power you have not only to build democracy in society, but also to achieve the democratisation of the residual state structures. How to achieve this goal?
- 3) Which are the new forms of power rising up from the new forms of democracy?

The last point is a very important one.

Self-governed democracy is not the "perfect" form of democracy at all. There's no form of democracy which can be defined "perfect", and, on the contrary, democracy is perhaps, above all, a way to understand and contrast the unavoidable limits of any form of political government and social managing.

Which are the limits of self-governed democracy?

First of all the fact that a *complete* self-governing process, even in a small social area, is impossible. We have a whole self government when the "policy makers" and the "policy takers" are the same people, when people who decide are all the people involved in the effects of such decisions. But it's only an abstract case. NGO, for instance, are organizations in which some people act for others (for poor and diseased people); public campaigns groups are the same: they fight for goals which affect the interests of many people, but only being a member of the group you can participate in the decision-making process. The only examples of real self government could be workers' councils, peasants' *asientamentos* and so on: there people asked for a common decision are the same people interested in the effects of those decisions. But really, often decisions are taken only by a small part of people. Also in self governed democracy, and above all in the organizations which have to manage with complex problems, we can see the formation of an *élite* (a wide, popular and maybe not authoritarian *élite*), often composed by experts and specialist which have substituted the ancient party bureaucracy. And whose power is often harder to contrast than the bureaucrats' one.

Thus, self governed democracy is certainly a way for building a modern and complex democracy, a more popular and "democratic" one, but it requires a great capability of criticism of the new forms of power which rise in it.

Anyway, only with the extension of such a kind of democracy, linked to a renewal of representative democracy and a transformation of public machine it's possible to form a new social and political subject, enabled to try again the building of a new kind of society.