

**NEW POPULISMS AND THE EUROPEAN RIGHT  
AND FAR RIGHT PARTIES.  
THE CHALLENGE AND THE PERSPECTIVES FOR THE LEFT**

**NUOVI POPULISMI E LE DESTRE ESTREME IN EUROPA  
LE SFIDE E LE PROSPETTIVE PER LA SINISTRA**



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*From "Il Manifesto", 13 September 2012*

## WORKSHOP

*New populisms are haunting Europe. These populisms are shaping the European political Rights. Both in the West and in the East. These new waves of the old discriminations, from the social, cultural, political, racial etc. point of view, are sharpened by the new discriminations due to the changes in the contemporary world. The context of the global crisis of capitalism and the environmental and climate crisis triggers the dynamics of the management of “fear” and of “emergency”. Popular strata and the lower strata of the middle classes of European society form the mass basis of these populisms and these Rights. The “construction of the enemy” forms the cultural background of legitimacy of the ruling classes. The aim of the meeting is to analyse the new phenomena and to discuss the conduct and the state of the European Left parties and social movements, grappling with the new context, and with the old problems of the redefinition of traditional political forms and of organizational forms.*

### Milan – Friday 9th and Saturday 10th March 2012 - Casa della Cultura – Via Borgogna 3

programme. Friday 9th March 2012 - h. 3.00-8.00 p.m.

Giorgio Riolo - An introduction to the workshop

Onorio Rosati (General Secretary Camera del Lavoro di Milano) – a

First session, introduction by Walter Baier – Nationalism and populism in Europe

*1. A theoretical framework: the crisis of capitalism and the cultures and subcultures that express it*

- Ernesto Laclau (University of Essex) - Populism as a theoretical concept

- René Monzat - New populisms vs. old populisms: the case of Front National in France

- Andrea Fumagalli (University of Pavia) - Labour and populism: the cleavage between “skilled” and “unskilled” labour and precarious work

*2. The cases and the national realities*

Dimosthenis Papadatos-Anagnostopoulos - Greece

Gerd Wiegel - Germany

Bernhard Heizelmaier - Austria

Roberto Biorcio (University of Milano) - Italy: Lega Nord and the Berlusconi's populism

Saturday 10th March, first session (second part) – h. 9.30 – 13 a.m.

*2. The cases and the national realities (second part)*

Adam Fabry – Hungary

Saverio Ferrari (Osservatorio Democratico) - The European Far Right landscape with special attention of East European populisms and Far-Right parties

*3. The European Rights as a crisis of the traditional attitude and the new context*

Thilo Janssen (Rosa Luxemburg Foundation) - What is the political Right up to in the European Parliament?

second session (first part)

*4. The European Lefts: crisis of the traditional approach and the new context*

contributions by

Elisabeth Gauthier (Espace Marx - France)

Yannis Stavrakakis (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki - Greece)

Mimmo Porcaro (Associazione Culturale Punto Rosso)

second session (second part) h. 3 – 6.30 p.m. final round table

*The challenge for the Lefts: new perspectives for new tasks*

introduction by Walter Baier

contributions by Luciana Castellina (former EP), Marga Ferre (European Left Party), Nicola Nicolosi (National Secretary Cgil), Klaus Sühl (Rosa Luxemburg Foundation)

organized by Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Transform! Europe, Associazione Culturale Punto Rosso

in cooperation with Camera del Lavoro Cgil di Milano and the review *Progetto Lavoro-Per la sinistra del XXI secolo*.

## Presentation

### A workshop aiming at studying the present situation of the populist and Far-right parties in Europe

Giorgio Riolo

Since the early Nineties of the last century in Europe some populist and Far-right parties, with specific features in each country, have appeared and developed. Some of them are openly Fascist and Neo-Nazi parties and movements, especially in East Europe, but not only. At that time the background of these new phenomena was the collapse of the so-called real Socialism and the deep crisis of the old Communist and left parties, mainly in Western Europe. In question was the political representation of the popular strata and the lower strata of the middle-class (the old “petty bourgeoisie”). Those were the effects of neoliberal policies (crisis of the social state, of the welfare state, privatizations, globalisation and the devaluation of labour etc.). In Italy, this was the background for the rise of Lega Nord and, later on, of Berlusconi’s populism. The former as criticism of the old political parties (as anti-political attitude, “Roma ladrona”-“Robber Rome”) giving a strong localist identity with other strong symbolic references. The latter as a new version of old Bonapartism (“it was people who elected me, therefore democracy, rules and the Constitution itself etc. are constraints to remove in order to get quick decisions for the benefit of our people”).

This framework is still valid to explain the presence and danger of the populist Right and its development on account of the present economic crisis. The real danger is the shift to the right as an outcome of the crisis. Globalization and, in Europe, decisions made outside each national State (Bce, EU, the Fmi, the “markets”, the new terrible Yahweh of Old Testament), the evident worsening of the living conditions of the popular strata and of the lower strata of the middle-class, the frustration and the need for symbolic compensations, the construction of the enemy (migrants, Rom people, foreigners or groups living in the same country etc.), the danger of the environmental crisis (water, land, climate etc.), all these features create the danger of a further development of these phenomena. The challenge for the Left parties in Europe is very hard, very pressing.

The aim of the workshop that the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Transform! Europe, Associazione Culturale Punto Rosso organized, in the last 9-10th March, 2012 in Milan (Italy), was to analyse the present situation from the theoretical point of view (in the first part) and to offer some case studies (in the second part). But the ultimate aim is to contribute to the strategy of the European Left parties in order to fight these phenomena.

This ebook don’t contain the presentation by René Monzat because we didn’t receive it. We choose to publish only the papers by the authors, not the transcription of the contributions in the seminar.

The ebook is only a tool for the political activity and not a scientific work.

## **Introduction. Peril from the Right<sup>1</sup>**

Walter Baier

Many serious observers hold that the crisis in Europe has not come to an end. With the restructuring of the Greek national debt and the enlargement of the European Stability Mechanism, only time was bought, yet the fundamental problems of over-accumulation<sup>2</sup> and the imbalances of the current accounts among the members of the Eurozone still persist.

Moreover, the agreement on the fiscal pact last March targets a sustained cementing of austerity politics accompanied by an authoritarian and centralist turn of EU integration under German hegemony. Should the fiscal pact indeed take effect, which under the complex ratification processes of 25 states is not to be taken for granted<sup>3</sup>, and should it be administered with the intended hardships, it will end by destroying the European social model, including dramatic reductions of living standards of populations in all parts of Europe.

Under these conditions, a renewed outbreak of the European debt and banking crisis within the foreseeable future is not unlikely. Probable consequences – this is the hypothesis of what follows here – would be a more or less voluntary departure of several single states from the monetary union. However, this is not first and foremost an economic question, but primarily a political one.

The breaking apart of the monetary union would make manifest and transform the latent crisis of European integration into a hard fact. It would lead to a qualitative shift in power relations in favour of the highest performing export oriented economies of the EU and could be the overture to a deep political earthquake all across the EU.

In a situation like this, nationalist, xenophobic and authoritarian right-wing forces could begin to go beyond the roles they have thus far played.

### **A theoretical concept of “populism”**

In the period between June 2009 and March 2011, right-wing parties obtained 155 of 3,066 seats in 13 parliaments, which represents approximately 5 % of the electorate. Moreover, this trend was also expressed by a strengthening of right-wing populist, Euro-sceptical parties in the European Parliament elections in 2010.

Even though national specifics are relevant to understanding the phenomena, these developments indicate a profound change in European political geography. As Tanja Binder shows in her study on the right in Europe, this is also occurring within the framework of a general rightist trend in the course of the latest period. “Only rightist populist parties have been able to expand their voter base” (see Binder, 2009, p. 60).

This means we are not dealing with dangerous yet sectarian groups at the margin of the society but with parties who are succeeding in pushing themselves into the centre of societies and influencing the political agenda even of moderate mainstream parties.

The parties under scrutiny have in fact modernised both their agenda and their vocabulary and therefore cannot be labelled easily as traditional right extremists. That is why contemporary political science uses the notion of “right-wing populism“ to characterise them. Typically “populism” then is characterised by a description, in which the following characteristics are named most frequently:

- 1) An ethnically or nationalistically founded collectivism loaded with, in some cases, a culturally motivated xenophobia;
  - 2) An offensive commitment to social inequality;
  - 3) Servile thinking combined with an authoritarian orientation of value judgements
  - 4) -Contempt for party democracy, freedom of speech and pluralism
- (see also Dörre/Kraemer/Speidel, 2004, p. 80).

However, attempts to apply these qualifications allegedly common to concrete cases demonstrate

deviations rather than offering confirmation, which makes doubtful the usefulness of positivistic characteristics.

What therefore seems more relevant is a theoretical approach. For this we cannot do without the works of Ernesto Laclau. He proposes that populism be characterised not first and foremost through its empirical phenomena, beyond those mentioned above – the “popular-democratic appeal, in other words, a direct addressing of the people, in its language and through its symbols, which all significant political parties have to attempt – but through the fact that those appeals are presented as an ‘antagonistic option’ against the ideology of the hegemonic bloc” (see Laclau, 1981: 151).

### **The construction of “Das Volk”<sup>4</sup>**

In Laclau’s (post)-structuralist analysis, a populist discourse is essentially characterised by its attempt to take up democratic demands which originally exist in their particularity and can be absorbed under normal circumstances by the institutions; but at a certain moment they cannot be further satisfied within the system. In articulating these demands like the members of a chain (“equivalential chain“ in his language), and providing them with a symbolic and political representation (a common signifier), be it by a slogan, a political vision or a leader, the former particular demands are transformed “into a broader social subjectivity which is synonymous with saying that it constitutes the people as a potential historical actor“ (Ernesto Laclau, 2005: 74).

With Laclau’s “equivalential chain” we cannot help being reminded of the well-known passage in Lenin’s “What is to be Done“, in which the ideal of a social-democratic professional revolutionary is expressed as the “tribune of the people“ “who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture“ (Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*, Chapt. III: E)

Would we therefore have to interpret Lenin’s brand of communism as a sort of “left populism“?

At this point, the limits of the political application of Ernesto Laclau’s analytical instrument come clearly into focus. It is to his credit that he has provided a usable concept for a structural analysis of political discourses. From this we can also deduce changes in political perspective: While the conventional liberal mainstream knows no better than to use the notion “populism” in a moralistic, pejorative way, it appears in Laclau as “one legitimate way among others of constructing the political bond” (ibid. 63). And, moreover, as he indicates at the end of his book: “The Political becomes synonymous with populism...since the construction of the ‘people’ is the political act *par excellence*” (Laclau 2005: 154).

This has one political consequence: If the construction of the people forms the essence of the political, the verdict of populism attached in an inflationary way to nearly any oppositional movement, regardless of its contents and aims, clearly becomes a “denigration of the masses“ on the part of the liberal main-stream due to their silent complicity with elites who are increasingly unable to justify their politics vis-à-vis the general population.

Yet, the “equivalent chain“ proposed by Laclau, “Hitler, Mao, Perón und De Gaulle”, is not at all convincing, and neither is the more general assertion that “‘populism’ (is) not a *type* of movement – identifiable with either a special social base or a particular ideological orientation – but a *political logic*” (Laclau: 2005: 117), last but not least because the political question stimulated by it – namely whether the left to be successful should also act in “populist“ ways – leads one astray.

#### **Crisis and systemic opposition**

In an earlier study, in which his analysis seemed closer to Marxism, Laclau demonstrates that “the appearance of populism is historically tied to a crisis of the dominant ideological discourse, which is on the other hand part of a general social crisis” (Laclau, 1981: 153). However, if populism is constituted by the fact that popular-democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the dominant bloc this does not necessarily imply that populism is equivalent to a revolutionary movement. On the contrary, to stimulate a populist development it may suffice, as Laclau

writes, that one class or class fraction needs a fundamental change within the power bloc to sustain its assertion of hegemony.

In this sense he distinguishes with good reason a populism of the ruling classes and a populism of the governed classes (Laclau: 1981: 151).

In other words, each crisis must be examined from two perspectives:

- a) from the perspective of those being governed;
- b) from the perspective of those being in power.

Regarding the latter, the critical question is if, and in what ways, today's rightist movements in Europe coincide with interests emerging within "the dominant class, more precisely in a group of the dominant class which facing the crisis of the dominant discourse wants to establish a new hegemony and thus sees itself forced to appeal against established ideology to 'the Volk' as a whole" (ibid. p. 153).

With regard to those who are governed the pivotal point is the serious deterioration of the social climate which is sufficiently documented throughout Europe, even in Germany, which is the first country at the core of the privileged zones of the Euro-territory. In questionnaires, more than half of the German population indicate that it feels threatened by current economic developments: 37% of them say they are "irritated" and 33% "angry" (Institute for Conflict and Violence Research – IKG, 2010: p. 3).

According to the same research, rightist, even extreme right, attitudes are on the rise in cases in which people are personally impacted by the crisis. Whoever feels threatened by the crisis tends to lean towards Islamophobia, xenophobia, defence of the privileges of established circles ("Etabliertenvorrechte"), anti-Semitism as well as a tendency towards sexism and homophobia (ibid. p. 8). And all this still in a situation in which no outspokenly right populist party exists.

## **The roots of hegemony**

Changes in mass consciousness of such quality and to such extents must always have to do with changes in peoples' practical life circumstances and also within the world of work where according to Gramsci, "hegemony originates" (see Gramsci, 1991, p. 132).

The trivial liberal mainstream comforts itself by arguing that change is always connected to insecurity. Moreover, so the argument goes, the losses which result so to speak naturally from "globalisation" hit certain social strata hardest, and they then become prone to rightist attitudes. Yet, this view simplifies and extenuates reality.

Indeed, social deterioration is becoming more and more recognised by masses of the people as a consequence of a politics which accepts the demands of financial markets and transnational enterprises as hard objective facts and imposes them as practical constraints on the populations. Moreover, since the 1980s, a whole generation experienced "change" and "reform" as being synonymous with growing suffering at the work place, insecurity and deterioration of the sense of equality. The key notion here is known as "precarity", which amounts to the practical negation of the welfare state achieved in Europe after World War II. Reaching far beyond the broad and ever growing zone of vulnerability it creates, precariousness of labour relations disintegrates the entire working world, including the zone of normal working relations (see Dörre/Kraemer/Speidel, 2004: p. 96).

While precarity effects the entirety of our societies, more and more people are in fact living under conditions of general scarcity, scarcity of goods and services, of security, of acceptance, of stable social relations, a state which the survey denotes as a "negative individualism" which opens the field for an increase of rightist populist orientations (Ibid. p. 101).

This means: If we want to delineate the social origins of the rise of extreme right positions coming into the "centre of society", the decreasing integration capacity of the welfare state combined with the weakening of organised labour has to be one of the focal points of our analyses. Ironically, modernised right-wing populist parties which hitherto advocated a pure anti-statist neoliberalism now posture as defenders of the welfare state – albeit with the crucial reservation that the "merit-based" welfare state be made exclusively accessible to the native populations.

This is much more than pure demagogy, as it demonstrates one of Laclau's most important

arguments, namely that significations in political discourses can float between opposing camps (“floating signifier”): The social welfare state in Europe has always been part and parcel of the process of income distribution in the framework of the nation-state. Once the neoliberal mantra is accepted that the further expansion of the welfare state is neither desirable nor possible due to financial limits, in other words once the disarticulation of social, so to say class-wise, distribution is accepted, even the idea of the welfare state is in danger of collapsing into its opposite – a reactive nationalism aimed at exclusion (compare, for example, the programme decided on in June 2012 by the Freedom Party of Austria:[http://www.fpoe.at/fileadmin/Content/portal/PDFs/2011/2011\\_graz\\_leitantrag\\_web\\_01.pdf](http://www.fpoe.at/fileadmin/Content/portal/PDFs/2011/2011_graz_leitantrag_web_01.pdf))

### **A phenomenon of the lower strata?**

Let us be careful! The conclusion often heard within liberal discourse – in which populism is first and foremost a phenomenon of a white, male under-class which rightfully experiences itself as a bunch of losers of modernisation and globalisation – does not hold up to empirical analysis. As demonstrated in the German survey quoted above, right-wing populist leanings have increased in parallel to the deepening of crisis on all social levels of income, since 2009 notably also within upper-income strata. The latter withhold their support from weaker groups and tend to downgrade them. Additionally, an aggressively loaded Islamophobia noticed in the centre, as well as left of centre, has significantly increased (ibid. p. 13).

In this respect, we read in the final summary of the IKG study: “In the wake of economic and societal effects of the crisis ... we are dealing with an increasingly brutalised bourgeoisie ... which additionally is spurred on by the press, that is, by allegedly liberal dailies and weeklies. It is not the size but the power of influence of higher income groups contributing to the negative transformation of the current social and political climate, which needs here to be taken in account.

### **Departure from democracy**

Existing empirical data in various countries demonstrate that an increasing number of those who feel threatened in their social existence by the crisis, tend to create an internal distancing from democracy. The crisis of political representation as witnessed throughout Europe is particularly grave, as the working class and popular strata need more from politics when faced with economic and social crisis.

Instead, the political class turns them over to the chill of financial markets. This has of course severe consequences, as the right/left dichotomy is no longer perceived by a large segment of the society as a rough equivalent of an upper-class / lower-class dichotomy. However, “crisis of political representation” seems to be too big a term to describe a fundamental process: the lack of interest shown by politicians in the working class and other popular strata is met by the populations’ lack of interest in politics.

In other words, alliances between middle-class strata and working people hitherto negotiated by the social-democratic and the green parties under the banner of a moderate neoliberalism, dissolve ostensibly, while political liberalism takes on an elitist character.

In this critical situation, the new right offers the possibility of rebellion without questioning the basic structures of capitalist property, as Walter Benjamin wrote in 1936 with reference to fascism which, as he said, sees salvation in “the masses achieving their expression (however by no means their rights)” (Benjamin, 1963: p. 41).

In closing: Following Ernesto Laclau’s analysis we have isolated a decisive characteristic of populism, in that it represents an “antagonistic option“ that collides with the ideology of the power blocs. However, this antagonistic option can be formulated from two positions which in themselves are antagonistic positions, that is, either from the standpoint of the right or from the left; from that of the dominant, or that of the governed class. This led us to the limits of Laclau’s analytical points of departure, in that according to him both positions could be subsumed under the common notion of

“populism”, which in turn would depreciate the substantively opposed contents into mere variants of the same thing. But what matters politically is not the identity; it is on the contrary the difference.

In this context, the notion of “populism” seems a euphemism for a new nationalist, xenophobic and anti-democratic right wing!

There is a paradox. The more successful the new right option has become in elections, the greater, so far, has been its failure when it had to stand the test of being in government. But we should not derive too much comfort from this considering that in Austria, for example, although Jörg Haider’s Freedom Party failed spectacularly in its government participation between 2000 and 2006, according to recent poll it is expected to come out of the forthcoming elections as a major political force.

The question is whether or not the “anti-elitism”, which marks the new right movements from their very inception, will turn into more than a gesture in consequence of the crisis or, to put it in other words, will coalesce into a project of groups of the ruling class.

Here the circle closes, as the answer to the question is intimately linked to the crisis of European integration, which conversely triggers the increasing nationalisms provoked by the austerity policies and the centralist authoritarian turn of the EU.

Much will depend on which of the competing concepts of the future role of Germany will prevail within its elites, and in this respect we must not take anything for granted at the moment; much of course will depend on the struggles unfolding particularly in the South of Europe on national levels against the austerity programs imposed on these countries.

Perhaps we will soon live to see a Europe in which the paths of nations will lead in opposite directions, either because the nationalist option within the ruling class will become decisive as well as popular by means of a new right wing, or because populations in single states will push for politics alternative to the prevalent austerity politics imposed through institutions of the EU.

In the case of any of the possible developments, the question of a peaceful, democratic future of national relations within a Europe based on solidarity, which requires a fundamentally restructured EU, will be at the centre of political struggles. What is however new is that this will take place in a constant confrontation with a new right wing and the nationalisms and chauvinisms embodied by it.

It is interesting that almost all of Marx’s famous text *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* — discussing something which today we might consider a predecessor of so called “populism” — deals with an analysis of the failures and defeats of diverse opposing forces – of liberalism and the left.

As far as today’s political left in Europe is concerned it is important to understand the close connection between material struggles and the struggle for power with the struggle to interpret the crisis. The left may prevail in this struggle over nationalism if it is able to develop a modernised class-based discourse and to articulate it with the very diverse popular demands of women, the trade unions, the ecologists, etc.

Some call this discourse “populist”. We know better: it is European and democratic.

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## Notes

- 1) This text is based on an introductory presentation and final remarks at the joint seminar, “New Populisms and the European Right and Far Right Parties: Challenge to and Perspectives of the Left” organised by transform! europe, Associazione Culturale Punto Rosso and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Milan on March 9, 2012.
- 2) See an interesting analysis in the *Financial Times*: “The post-crisis crackdown on banking has left the way open for a rapid growth in alternative funding areas (...) The ‘shadow banking’ system, meanwhile a phrase used to encompass a broad range of institutions and mechanisms, from hedge funds to ‘repo’ markets, has recovered more rapidly and is poised to usurp banks in a variety of ways... Some worry that the growth of non-bank lending...allow new, unmonitored bubbles to grow unchecked until they once again drag down the banking system and the larger economy” (Patrick Jenkins et alii, 2012).
- 3) At the time of this writing, the referendum in Ireland is about to take place. It remains uncertain in what other countries referenda on the fiscal pact are planned and what kind of consequences the result of the French elections for president and parliament will have on the fiscal pact itself.
- 4) In this context it is important to remember that the word “Volk”, due to its use by National Socialism (“Volksgemeinschaft”), has a negative connotation in German different from that of the corresponding terms in the romance languages (“people”, “popolo”, or “pueblo”). The problem, however, is identical: the double sense of the political concept “Volk”. It can mean the population in contrast to the state and elites, that is, the totality of the oppressed and exploited within a nation, or the population of a nation in contrast to other nations, that is, an ethnically or culturally defined exclusive identity. The most appropriate approach in my opinion is to define “Volk” as a population structured through hegemony exercised by a certain social group.

## Why populism?

Ernesto Laclau

The notion of populism has traditionally had pejorative connotations in the scientific and political literature. The reason is that it has classically been associated with aberrant political phenomena, grounded in the reduction of vast sections of the population to the status of masses, deprived of any internal structuration and of any principles of rational action. Once this becomes the case, the story goes, the way is open to all forms of demagogic manipulation. This vision prevails not only in conservative circles but also in a great deal of the Left. In the case of Marxism, for instance, the rationality of *class* (of class interests) is opposed to the notion of masses, which is quickly dismissed as constituting a *lumpenproletariat*. Class of history would be constituted around precise locations within the productive process, and human history would show its rational substance when conceived as a history of production. Masses, on the other hand, are marginal or aberrant phenomena for they are, precisely, deprived of such location, and so they are also deprived of the possibility of constituting *interests*. This would leave them in the position of being infinitely malleable at the hands of unscrupulous politicians.

In my work I have tried to challenge such a vision, and to show that 'populism', far from being an aberrant phenomenon, identifiable with all kinds of social *anomie*, has its own principles of internal structuration, principles that are one of the constitutive dimensions of the political as such. To see things this way, however, requires to do away with a series of preconceptions which have governed for long time the prevailing approaches to history and politics. The most important of these preconceptions is the idea that history is teleologically unified by logics of development (the cunning of Reason in Hegel, the development of productive forces in Marx) which transform it into a coherent story. Once this perspective is accepted, there is only one step to transform the chosen rational principle in the bedrock of historical development and to dismiss as marginal and irrelevant everything which is heterogeneous vis-à-vis that principle. 'Populism' would be one of these heterogeneous and irrational elements.

If, however, this basic preconception of sociological and historical rationalism is put into question, the roles are reversed: *homogeneity* ceases to be the *fundamentum inconcussum* of history and it is reduced to be an always threatened process of *hegemonic homogenization*. Heterogeneity, thus, becomes primary. Once this new angle of vision is adopted, many phenomena which had been conceived as marginal and aberrant, become social logics which are inscribed at the heart of the communitarian structure. 'Populism' is one of them. But this obviously requires an enlarged notion of populism.

There are, in my view, three defining features of populism. The first is that it requires a relation of equivalence between a plurality of social demands. If in a certain quarter there are, for instance, unfulfilled demands concerning health, but people see that in that area there are also other unsatisfied demands concerning housing, schooling, transport, security, etc, a certain solidarity is established between all of them. This is what we call an *equivalential chain*, and is the first necessary precondition for the emergence of 'the people' as a collective actor. The more solid this solidarity becomes, the more each individual demand will be internally split between its own particularity and its inscription in the wider popular chain of equivalences. So, far from being 'the people' an amorphous and homogeneous mass, it has a clear principle of structuration: the differential particularism of the individual demands not only does not disappear, but is the precondition of the equivalence which would constitute the broader popular identity.

This, however, is not enough to have populism. A vague feeling of generalized dissatisfaction creates, at most, a prepopulist climate. A second precondition of populism is that a qualitative jump takes place, and that all the equivalential demands crystallize in a discourse that divides society into two

camps: 'the people' and those in power. Without the discursive construction of a socio-political enemy, there is no populism in the sense that we give to the term. And it becomes immediately evident that this dichotomization of the social field can be made from the most different ideologies. Populism is not an ideology but a way of constructing the political based in interpellating the underdog against those in power. There are right wing and left wing populisms. In the Latin American experience of the last fifteen years we have mainly left wing populisms, while present day European populisms have been in most cases mobilizations of the Right.

A third defining feature of populism is linked to what we have called 'empty signifiers'. Once the equivalential chain has been established, it is necessary to signify it as a totality –only with this further step the populist operation is completed. Representing the chain as a totality, however, requires means of representation. What are these possible means? Clearly, only the individual demands composing the chain. So what is required is that one particular demand or group of demands, without renouncing to their own particularity, becomes the signifier of the totality of the chain. This operation by which a certain particularity, without ceasing being particular, assumes the representation of a universality transcending it, is what we call hegemony. Populism essentially involves a hegemonic operation. And a hegemonic signifier is always a tendentially *empty* one. It is easy to see why. The more extended the equivalential chain is, the looser will be the connection of the hegemonic signifier with the demand which constituted its original signified. So there is the paradox that the richer is the *extension* of the signifying chain, the poorer will be the signifier unifying it from the viewpoint of its *intension*. *Reductio ad absurdum*, it would be a pure name –in most cases the name of a leader.

Having thus characterized populism we see, on the one hand, that any populist operation is a very complex one, its structuration involving specific logics, and, on the other, that populist logics are far more extended than what the usual notion of populism presupposes. To what is populism opposed? The answer is: to *institutionalism*. While populism is based in the expansion of the equivalential logic, institutionalism is grounded in a differential one. In an institutionalist political arrangement, each demand is absorbed in its own individuality, without establishing equivalential relations with other demands. There is no room for the emergence of a 'people'. The tendency of institutionalism is to replace politics by administration. The most extreme form of institutionalism would be a purely technocratic government of experts. Already in the XIXth century Saint-Simon had said that it is necessary to replace the government of men by the administration of things.

Thus, we can see the process of construction of the political as a continuum whose two ideal extremes would be pure populism and pure institutionalism. These two extremes are, of course, *reduction ad absurdum* ones. In practice, any hegemonic formation is constructed at intermediate points of the continuum, combining in different degrees equivalence and difference. There is no institutionalist system that manages to function with such clock-work precision that it can avoid all popular equivalences, and there is no populist mobilization that can entirely do away with any kind of institutional anchoring. But this involves that populism is an internal component of any political system, not a realm of aberrant heterogeneity which could be excluded from the functioning of a rational society. It is also important to determine the specific areas in which the equivalential logic can operate: at the local level, at the level of the nation-state, even at the international level.

This is perhaps the point for saying something about the relationship between populism and democracy. It is interesting to see that, at the beginning of the XIX century in Europe 'democracy' was a term to which negative connotations were associated, as it is the case with populism today. As C.B. Macpherson has pointed out, while liberalism was a respected political regime, democracy was associated with Jacobinism and mob-rule, and it was necessary the whole process of revolutions and reactions of the XIX century to reach some (always precarious) integration between both –so that today people think of 'liberal-democratic' as constituting a unified entity. However, if this integration was reached to some extent in Europe, it was far more precarious in Latin America. Liberal States were

constituted all over Latin America during the second half of the XIX century, but they were not democratic at all, for they represented the typical form of organization of the landowning oligarchies, and they were based in clientelistic mechanisms, which were not sensitive at all to the popular demands..

For these reasons, when –as a result of the economic development- the popular demands became more pressing at the beginning of the XX century, they did not tend to express themselves through the mechanisms of the liberal State but through alternative political forms –frequently, nationalistic military governments. These governments were strongly populist, in so far as they interpellated the masses in a direct way, skipping the mediation of the institutions of traditional politics. It is worth while remembering the way in which Latin American political machines worked before the advent of populism. At different levels of the political pyramid, a rigid clientelistic system operated based in the exchange of votes for personal favours. The secret suffrage did not exist in most Latin American countries. The operation of equivalential logics, in the sense that we have defined them, could only be extremely limited –the structure of the whole system conspired against them. The crisis of the latter was precipitated by the slump of the 1930's, which made increasingly difficult to satisfy individual demands through clientelistic mediation. So a typical pre-populist situation developed: the accumulation of unfulfilled demands, on one side, and the increasing inability of the liberal State to satisfy them through the methods of traditional politics. So populist ruptures took place through the mobilization of the masses by a new generation of political leaders. Their action was profoundly democratic, in the sense that they launched masses to the political arena and so they opened the public sphere to sectors who had been traditionally excluded from it; but, in order to do so, they had to break, one way or the other, with many principles of the formal organization of the liberal State. In a few years we see the emergence of Vargasism in Brazil, of Peronism in Argentina, of the first Ibanismo in Chile, of the MNR in Bolivia. These governments, in their break with liberalism, were however democratic, in their social and economic policies, for they redistributed income in a progressive direction and promoted the industrialization of their countries. Thus, there was in Latin America a clear bifurcation in the democratic experience of the masses, between a liberal-democratic tradition and a national popular one. This bifurcation was going to remain for most of the XX century, and it is only after the brutal military dictatorships experienced by countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay, that the bases for a confluence between the two traditions were established. Over the last few years we have seen the emergence of governments in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, which are strongly populist in orientation, but which respect, however, the formal rules of liberal democracy.

The Latin American national popular democracies are, however, very different from the European democracies. For one thing, the Latin American democracies are strongly presidentialist, while parliamentary governments are the rule in Europe. The reasons for this are well rooted in the Latin American democratic experiences, where the Executive power has frequently been the seat of progressive changes, while the parliaments were in many cases the point of reconstitution of conservative forces. This leads me to a more general remark: it is a mistake to think that the European forms of liberal democracy constitute a universal paradigm to which all societies should approach and conform. Each society has its own way of incorporating social demands to the political system –the Western is only one of them. The Arab countries are experiencing, no doubt, a wave of democratic revolutions, but the political arrangements emerging from this process will differ in each country, let alone from the European pattern.

A last point which requires some emphasis. To construct a 'people' is, in our view, to articulate demands in an equivalential chain. The category of 'demand' has, in that sense ontological priority over that of 'group'. The unity of the group is just the result of an articulation of demands. And each demand does not have inscribed within itself, as a 'manifest destiny', those with which it is going to be articulated. That will depend on a hegemonic intervention. To construct a 'people' is an eminently political operation. There is no reason why a particular democratic demand could not be articulated to

other with a completely different political orientation from that we would approve of. It is naïve to think that the racist and xenophobic discourses of right wing political discourses are uniformly reactionary: even in them there are interpellations to real needs and demands of the ‘people which are, of course, associated with reactionary elements. Being the construction of the ‘people’ a politico-hegemonic construction, its terrain of constitution is that of a *war of position*, a central Gramscian category. And, given the importance that the Gramscian tradition has had in the elaboration of my approach to populism, I would like to devote the last part of this article to discuss how the Gramscian rediscovery of the ‘people’ took place within the horizon which is the ground of Gramsci’s intervention, which is that of Marxism.

Classical Marxism was not a very promising terrain for the emergence of a notion of the ‘people’, let alone of populism. Populism requires, as we have seen, the construction of a chain of heterogeneous demands, unified only by a hegemonic political articulation. Marxism, on the other hand, presupposed the unity and homogeneity of the revolutionary subject. Its main sociological thesis was that of the increasing simplification of the social structure under capitalism, whose laws of movement would lead to the disappearance of the middle classes and the peasantry, so that the last antagonistic confrontation of history would be that between the capitalist bourgeoisie and a homogeneous proletarian mass. In that a vision, the only task that the socialist forces should envisage was to help the proletariat’s organization and to leave the laws of history to freely operate in the direction of the desired end. Kautsky, for instance, asserted in a debate with the Bavarian social-democrat Vollmar, that the task of the socialists was not to defend the interests of all the oppressed but only those of the workers, because they were the bearers of the future of humanity. Within this perspective, there was not the slightest space for any hegemonic rearticulation.

Things were, however, complicated by the fact that different countries were in different stages of development. These differences, however, were approached with the same narrow ‘classist’ perspective. In countries with absolutist or feudal regimes, the task ahead was to carry out the bourgeois-democratic revolution, and the canonical view was that the natural agent of this task, -whose model was the French Revolution- could only be the liberal bourgeoisie. Leninism modified only partially this scheme. On the one hand it recognized that the canonical succession of stages did not apply to the Russian case: the Russian bourgeoisie was too weak and undeveloped to carry out the democratic revolution, so democratic tasks had to a class different to the one which should have been its natural agent: the working class in alliance with the peasantry. On the other hand, however, the class nature of the agents and the tasks did not change. The democratic tasks were still bourgeois even if carried out by the proletariat, and the identity of the latter was not at all contaminated by the new tasks that it was supposed to assume. The limit of the Leninist opening was given by the notion of ‘class alliances’, with its motto of ‘to strike together and to march separately’. The ‘people’ was still far away from the field of Marxist theorization.

There were the experiences of the 1920’s and 30’s that started changing this perspective and creating the bases for the emergence of political popular identities wider than classes –and, thus superseded the narrow limits of the notion of ‘class alliances’. The anti-colonialist struggles, going beyond sectorial differentiations, were pushing in the direction of national identities wider than classes. Mao-Tse-Tung, in the 1930’s, is going to speak about ‘contradictions within the *people*’. The language is still, to some extent, Leninist, but a new category (*the people*), which we certainly do not find in Lenin –nor, for that matter, in the ensemble of the previous Marxist tradition- becomes an increasing part of the Communist vocabulary. The experience of the Popular Fronts in Europe, in the course of the anti-Fascist struggle, corroborated this trend.

Behind these developments there was the increasing realization that this gap between tasks and agents, which was first perceived in the strategic discussions preceding the Russian Revolution, was not a mere Russian peculiarity but a much wider phenomenon which is illustrated, for instance, in the

theory of combined and uneven development which generalizes, world-wide the gap tasks/agents. In the 1930's Trotsky will conclude that combined and uneven development is the terrain of all contemporary social struggles. But, if 'abnormal' combinations are the rule, one cannot avoid asking oneself: what is a normal development?

At some point it was impossible maintain the purely classist determination of the identities of tasks and agents, and the process of mutual contamination between them was unstoppable. Trotsky never actually reached the point of recognizing –let alone theorize- that contamination. But others started doing so. The highest theorization of it during those years can be found in Gramsci. We find in his work a series of new categories which are going to deeply transform what was thinkable within Marxist discourse: hegemony, the duality corporative/hegemonic class, war of position, integral State, etc. I cannot enter into a discussion of them. I will only make three remarks concerning the significance of Gramsci for the discussion that we started at the beginning of this essay.

1) For Gramsci social agents are not classes, in the strict sense of the term, but what he called 'collective wills'. Behind the constitution of collective wills there is an articulatory logic which brings heterogeneous elements into unity. This passage from heterogeneity to unity is quite close to what earlier on we have called logic of equivalence.

2) The hegemonic force of a socio-political formation is not a fully constituted identity which would impose its preconceived whole vision over the rest of the community but is, on the contrary, constructed as a result of the interaction between sections of the community. In that way he resolves, in one stroke, the intractable problem faced by previous theorizations of hegemony which had not transcended the Leninist 'class alliances'. If the forces composing the 'collective will' were fully-fledged identities, the hegemonic operation would consist in the hopeless task of putting together the pieces of a puzzle –and this putting together could only be an act of sheer imposition. But if the identities are not fully fledged because the equivalential relations are an integral part of themselves, in that case there is a there is an organic link between them and the consensual dimension is far more achievable. In the same way, In the same way, the hegemonic force does not have a fully-fledge identity either, because the process of construction of its hegemony is also the process of constructing its own identity –it can only become hegemonic by transforming its own identity in an empty signifier.

3) Finally, for Gramsci, the hegemonic operation cuts across the distinction State/civil society. For Hegel the State was the only locus of universality: bureaucracy was the universal class. Marx denied this, by asserting that the State was an instrument of the dominant class; for him the locus of universality lies in civil society: the universal class is the proletariat. Gramsci agrees with Marx in asserting that processes taking place at the level of civil society are part of the construction of universality. But agrees with Hegel in that those processes are essentially political (now extended to the whole communitarian terrain). Marx postulated the withering away of the State; Gramsci, the constitution of an integral State. For him, the only universality that a community can reach is a *hegemonic* universality, always based on contingent articulations.

Today, obviously, in a globalized world, we see that this contingency is deeper than what Gramsci, in the 1930's could perceive. But this does not change the fact that in his work we find one of the most perceptive anticipations of what would be our contemporary world. We still think and work sull'orma di Gramsci.

# The Populism of Precarity

Andrea Fumagalli

## 1. Introduction

A book about the 1977 movement published in 1978 contains the following passage:

‘The fundamental feature of this condition, which probably characterises the majority of young people from 15 to 25 years of age, is precarity. This is a concept that has been abused but not explored in depth. For example, if it refers only to the work regime it is decidedly partial and misleading. In fact, precarity extends to the whole life of this mass of young people ... A condition of precarity that also in a way is an existential life choice and, for some sectors, a breaking with certainty, a wish for personal “destabilisation”; for others, the acceptance of a mode of life which, dictated by complex social relations, allows a minimum level of subsistence and some autonomy of behaviour.’<sup>1</sup>

There are two points that we can take from the passage cited.

The first is that precarity is not a recent issue and already existed by the mid-1970s in connection with the crisis of the Fordist-Taylorist paradigm. As is known, the 1977 movement is the first critical post-Fordist social movement and as such expresses the first forms of the new composition of living labour, which began to spread throughout the country with the implosion of large-factory production.

The second point relates to the ambiguity resulting from the condition of precarity: in the first place, ‘existential life choice’, ‘breaking with certainty’, ‘personal destabilisation’ and, only later, ‘acceptance of a mode of life’ that however still guaranteed some form of subsistence. In this context, precarity was still seen as an opportunity for liberation from the cage of stable and secure wage labour. It would be more appropriate to speak of ‘flexibility’ rather than precarity. The yearning within the ‘social autonomy’ of those years for a notion of work no longer subject to the constraints imposed by the rhythms of machines and for freeing the potential of desire as an opting for self-realisation, however, has in no way led to a promised land. As Franco Berardi bluntly puts it:

‘What were, in fact, the medium-term results of the libertarian and anti-authoritarian wave? Above all, the laying of bases for the neoliberal turn: Social autonomy crystallised into neo-entrepreneurship, the message propagated by the free radios opened the way to the oligopoly of commercial television stations; the break represented by the historic compromise opened the way to Craxian modernisation; the radical critique of wage labour flowed into the employer offensive against employment and into the restructuring that has drastically reduced the hours of one’s life spent as a blue-collar worker ... And, finally, the criticism of ideological and historicist dogmatism opened the way to the glittering cult of surfaces, to the blah blah of the ephemeral and then to the predominance of the cultural market.’<sup>2</sup>

It is on this ambiguity, which characterises the transformations of the labour market from the late 1970s up to the present, that the semantic trick of the term ‘flexibility’ depends, which conceals the increasingly widespread and generalised reality of precarity in all of Europe. Today, this ambiguity, which refers to the dichotomy ‘flexibility versus precarity’, is the central theme for an analysis of the labour market in a biopolitical framework. What this involves is an investigation of the relation between the external manifestation of the condition of labour and its subjective internal perception.

Such an analysis has inevitably to take account of the emergence of a bio-economic paradigm of accumulation (cognitive bio-capitalism), within which knowledge, either in terms of generation (economies of learning) or of diffusion (network economies) represents the key for defining the new forms of the division of labour and its material and subjective conditions.

In the new millennium, the condition of precarity has become a structural fact, often characterised by a situation of impotence and individualism, to the point of possibly generating ‘monsters’. Indeed there is a certain thinking that arises from the condition of precarity, which in a sharpened economic crisis can assume populist, demagogic and dangerous dimensions. After having dealt with the issue of precarity in its new post-Fordist aspects, we will discuss these dimensions in the last section.

<sup>1</sup>See Gad Lerner, Luigi Manconi and Mario Sinibaldi, *Uno strano movimento di strani studenti: composizione, politica e cultura dei non garantiti*, Feltrinelli: Milan, 1978.

<sup>2</sup>See Franco Berardi (alias ‘Bifo’), *Dell’Innocenza. 1997: l’anno della premonizione*, Verona: Ombre Corte, 1997, p. 9.

## 2. The features of the precarious condition

The bio-political essence of the process of contemporary accumulation is manifested in the process of valorisation. This process is present at the moment in which the financial markets determine a financial norm,<sup>3</sup> in the exploitation of the *general intellect* (intellectuality), in the networked diffusion of production and of nomadic labour (territory) and in the symbolic production of commodities (publicity).<sup>4</sup>

Financial norms, intellectuality, territoriality and publicity not only represent the phenomenal form of value creation, but determine in an irreversible way the modalities of the bioeconomic accumulation process of cognitive capitalism. These are constituent parts of the capital – labour relation, which in cognitive biocapitalism, in contrast to Fordist capitalism, is a relation we can say is *mobile*.

With this term we mean to indicate that the performance of labour is characterised today by *subjective mobility* and *objective mobility*. Subjective mobility means that the labour relation takes on different connotations according to whether the performance of labour implies the direct activity of production, reproduction or of consumption; and whether what dominates is the use of the body, feelings or the brain.

This is translated into an *objective mobility* defined by the flow of commodities and of people, which constitute the place and time of production.

It is in such a sense that time and space define a vectorial complex of flows, which, according to the organisational model prevailing at different times, witness the ceaseless transition and recombination of labour subjectivities. Labour in cognitive capitalism is mobile inasmuch as it is dispersed within a productive sphere that has no immediate boundaries: It is not containable in a single space (such as factories could be) or in a single organisational model (as Taylorist organisation was). It is this mobility of labour which nourishes the general intellect, as the result of the social cooperation which from time to time recomposes the diverse flows on which it is based. It is this mobility which is at the origin of the concept of *multitude*,<sup>5</sup> a term contrived to take account of the complexity of labour forces not reducible to a an indivisible whole, to a homogeneous stock.

In cognitive bio-capitalism, the mobile condition of the labour force is accompanied by the prevalence of individual contracts.<sup>6</sup> This is due to the fact that it is nomadic individualities that are put to work and that the primacy of private rights over still-to-be-constructed communal rights leads to the transformation of the contribution of individualities, above all if characterised by cognitive, relational and affective activities, into contractual individualism.

It follows that the intrinsic mobility of labour is transformed into the *subjective precarity* of labour.

In this context, the condition of precarity assumes new forms. Human labour in the course of capitalism's development has always been characterised by a more or less diffuse precarity depending on the conjunctural phase and the relations of force that prevail at different times. This occurred in a massive way in pre-Taylorist capitalism and also, though in a milder way, in Fordist capitalism. However, in these periods, it was always the precarity of the condition of labour which was spoken of, in so far as predominantly manual labour always implied a distinction between the time allotted for work itself and rest time, that is, between working time and living time understood as non-work time or free time. Union struggles of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were always directed at reducing working time in favour of non-working time.<sup>7</sup> In the transition from industrial-Fordist to bio-cognitive capitalism, digital and relational labour has become increasingly widespread to the point that it has come to define the principal modes of work performance. The separation is broken between the human being and the machine that regulates, organises and disciplines manual labour. As soon as the brain and life become

<sup>3</sup>See Christian Marazzi, *Il comunismo del capitale*, Ombre Corte: Verona, 2011; André Orléan, *Dall'euforia al panico. Saggi sulla crisi finanziaria*, Ombre Corte: Verona, 2010; Stefano Lucarelli, 'La finanziarizzazione come forma di biopotere' in Andrea Fumagalli and Sandro Mezzadra (eds.), *La crisi economica globale*, Ombre Corte: Verona, 2010, pp. 101-120.

<sup>4</sup>See Andrea Fumagalli, *Bioeconomia e capitalismo cognitivo*, Carocci: Rome, 2007, especially pp. 195-198.

<sup>5</sup>See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, The Penguin Press: New York, 2004.

<sup>6</sup>See Andrea Fumagalli, *Bioeconomia*, op.cit.

<sup>7</sup>For a more complete analysis, see Aldo Marchetti, *Il tempo e il denaro. Saggi sul tempo di lavoro dall'età classica all'epoca della globalizzazione*, F. Angeli: Milan, 2010.

an integral part of labour, the distinction between living time and working time loses its meaning. This is when contractual individualism, which is behind the juridical precarity of labour, overflows into the subjectivity of the individuals themselves, conditions their behaviour and is transformed into *existential precarity*.

In cognitive bio-capitalism, precarity is, in the first place, *subjective*, therefore existential and therefore *generalised* – and for this reason it is a *structural* condition internal to the new relation between capital and cognitive-relational labour, the consequence of the contradiction between social production and the individualisation of the labour relation, between social cooperation and hierarchy.

Precarity is a *subjective* condition as far as it enters directly into the perception of individuals in different ways according to people's expectations and ideas and the degree of knowledge (culture) they have.

Precarity is an *existential* condition because it is pervasive and present in all the activities of individuals and not only in the strictly work sphere, in a context moreover where it is increasingly difficult to separate work from non-work – also because the uncertainty that the condition of precarity creates is disassociated from any form of insurance that goes beyond the behaviour of the individuals themselves, following the progressive dismantling of the *welfare state*.

Precarity is a *generalised* condition because even those who are in a stable and guaranteed work situation are perfectly aware that this situation could end from one moment to the next as the result of processes of restructuring, outsourcing, as a result of conjunctural crises, the bursting of a speculative bubble, etc. This consciousness in fact makes the behaviour of the most secure workers very similar to that of the workers who objectively and directly experience an actually 'precarious' situation. The multitude of labour is thus either directly precarious or psychologically precarious.

### 3. The composition of atypical labour

From the point of view of contract types, the condition of precarity cuts across the classical juridical distinction between dependent and independent labour. This classic distinction becomes inadequate for capturing the complexity of juridical regulation.

The process of flexibilisation of the labour market in Italy began a 'long, long time ago', precisely in 1984, almost thirty years ago. It all began with Law No. 863, which was promulgated on December 19 of that year, the result of the so-called Scotti Protocol on labour costs (1983), the prototype of the future trade-union concertation.<sup>8</sup> In this law, criteria for part-time work were extended and solidarity contracts<sup>9</sup> and work-training contracts introduced. Then, in 1987, Law No. 56 made it possible to extend the limited-period contract to all sectors.

This was the beginning of a juridical practice that marked the process of flexibilisation of Italy's labour market. Let us briefly recall its principal stages.

Law No. 146, 12 June 1990, on the limitation of the right to strike, sets forth the obligation to give notice before declaring a strike and to guarantee the maintenance of work activity for tasks necessary for the public.

Law No. 236, 19 September 1994, added the possibility of hiring workers with intern contracts.

Law No. 299, 16 May 1994, extended the use of mobility and of work-training contracts and regulated solidarity contracts (according to which workers in part assume the burden, at their own expense, of the economic difficulties of the particular enterprise). In the meanwhile, the umpteenth 'concertative' accord between the social partners (as always, under a centre-left government), of 24 September 1996, euphemistically called the 'Accordo per il Lavoro' (the Accord for Work), made possible in the following year, the approval of the law that more than any other definitively and irreversibly gives a green light to total flexibility of demand for labour on the part of the enterprises: Law No. 196, 24 June 1997, called the 'Pacchetto Treu', from the name of the then minister of labour. In it, temp agency work is introduced (Article 1-11), the use of limited-period contracts is extended

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<sup>8</sup>Translator's note: The tripartite collective bargaining process (between union, government and employers' association) operative in Italy from 1993 until its de facto disappearance in 2009.

<sup>9</sup>Translator's note: Accords between employer and union representatives to reduce working hours, and sometimes wages, in order to maintain employment or expand it to newly hired workers.

(Article 12), as are part-time contracts (also for people with doctorates, with the possibility of transfer from the public to the private at zero cost for the private enterprise, Article 14<sup>10</sup>), the lengthening of work-training contracts in depressed areas, Article 15), the development of apprenticeship contracts, etc., etc.

The declared purpose of the Treu law is the flexibilisation of the conditions of entry into the labour market, in order to incentivise employment. What it in fact does, on the contrary, is to favour a constant and growing process of substituting permanent labour contracts with precarious labour.<sup>11</sup> This is the undeclared but actual objective of this law, following which we saw the boom of atypical contracts, above all in the phase of entry into the labour market. The completion of the flexibilisation and deregulation of hiring mechanisms occurs with Law No. 469, 23 December 1997, which establishes the decentralisation and privatisation of job placement and the predominance of individual recruitment over the system of public recruitment.<sup>12</sup>

This process is integrated into a structurally flexible<sup>13</sup> production texture characterised by a high level of decentralisation based on an enterprise size that is very limited (just over half of the European average) with scant presence of trade-union organisations. It follows that in Italy, the rate of autonomous labour is more than double that of Europe or the United States and that the number of workers to which the Workers Statute can be applied is less than 30 % of the entire labour force. If we realise that para-subordinate workers (that is, co.co.co, or ‘coordinated and continuing collaborators’ a labour category formula which has lasted only in Italy), the autonomous workers dependent on others’ decisions, those compelled to take out tax I.D. numbers as if they were businesses, etc., the labour market in Italy emerges as the most flexible in Europe, and in terms of mobility rates it is in no way second to that of the United States.

In any case, on the eve of the new millennium it appeared that even all of this was not enough. In the course of 2002 Maroni’s Libro Bianco was published. In the text, beyond a detailed analysis of the labour market in Italy, a series of intervention measures was proposed, which turn on three main principles:

- Augment flexibility in hiring by introducing a new type of labour contract: project work;
- develop flexibility in leaving a job through a revision of Article 18 of the Workers Statute (Law No. 300, 20 May 1970), an issue that then becomes central in the exception made within the Financial Law for 2002 in the matter of labour-market reform: Parliamentary Decree 848 and 848bis;
- reduce the national collective contract to the benefit of individual contracts.

On 9 October 2003, the indications given by Maroni’s Libro Bianco found their application in Law No. 235 containing the new regulation of employment and the labour market (Legislative Decree of 10 September 2003, No. 276). The provision involves the following issues:

1. Access to work: The definitive disappearance of the public job placement/recruitment system, and thus its privatisation, was sanctioned. The activity of temporary work agencies was liberalised; they can extend their ‘services’ to any function of access to jobs, from training to any other mediation of labour power. Probably the most dangerous intervention is the combination of the revision of the

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<sup>10</sup>It is on the basis of this article that a process is underway in Italian universities of substituting the position of researcher on permanent contract by recipients of four-year research allowances.

<sup>11</sup>This tendency has particularly concerned younger people: Today on average in Italy two out of three young people enter the labour market with an atypical contract, a proportion which in some regions, such as Lombardy and Piedmont, is more than 75 %. Flexibility when entering the labour market has – but only in the last two years and in conjunction with slight economic growth (which has ended in any case) – made possible an increase in the number of jobs but not in the standard units of labour. The latter term defines the standard job of 40 hours a week, which thanks to the tremendous increase in atypical contracting, can be occupied by more than one person (for example, with a part-time or limited-period contract).

<sup>12</sup>Translator’s note: In the former, public, system, employers had to contact the government agency, which established an order of priority in hiring based on seniority, job category, family and other needs, and workers were thus called according to their number in the order of priority. Now the employer can hire the individual directly without considering social criteria.

<sup>13</sup>The Taylorist model of the large factory took root in Italy only in the northwestern regions. In the rest of the peninsula, manufacturing and service production was always characterised by great fragmentation. This is an aspect rarely taken into consideration when comparisons are made on the European level.

norms on the transferring of a branch of a corporation's activity with the 'admissibility of administering the labour power, even of permanent-contract jobs', and the concomitant abolition of Law No. 1369 of 1960 which prohibited the 'mere administration of labour power' (which is the principal legislative tool for disputes against precarious labour and was the result of struggles, in particular those of day labourers against the system of directly hiring farm labour for very low wages by landowners' agents). The entirety of these interventions introduces into Italy the instrument of 'staff leasing', which is very widespread in the USA, that is, permanent temporary work. This allows the company using it an enormous flexibility and liberates it, depending on how large it is, from contractual and legal ties (including Article 18 of the Workers Statute).

2. Forms of contract: With this provision the intention is to favour and extend the various types of precarious contracts, in the sphere of training, working hours and contract type. In terms of training, beyond the most recent extension of apprenticeship and internship, what is important is the wish to favour agreements between schools and universities, on the one hand, and companies, on the other, with the purpose of facilitating 'job placement measures that do not constitute a relation of labour'. In practice, students will be served up gratis to companies in the form of stages and interns, or almost gratis because, from the goodness of the companies' and universities' hearts, there could be an 'eventual payment of a subsidy' (the result of the university reform). On contractual types, it establishes on-call work, that is, 'the availability to fulfil tasks of an intermittent discontinuous character'; it establishes work in terms of tasks divided 'among two or more workers, with joint and several liability in relation to an employer'; for work tasks that are occasional and ancillary, in general and with particular reference to opportunities of social welfare, these tasks can be regularised through the mechanism of goods as substitutes for salary; tasks are created which fall outside the labour market and the attendant obligations, and which are performed as help, mutual help, a moral obligation without payment, especially in agriculture; temp agency work is extended to the agricultural sector; it normalises contracts of coordinated and continuing collaboration (co.co.co) and through certification it seeks to impede labour disputes over this; finally, for the worker-shareholder, it provides for exceptions to the national collective contract and the non-application of Title III (re union activity) and of Article 18 of the Workers Statute, which, moreover, the cooperatives already do not apply thanks to contracts and norms that interpret the worker-shareholder as a sort of entrepreneur. The text was emended with modifications introduced by the Decree Law of 25 June 2008, No. 112 (converted into Law No. 133, 6 August 2008) regarding occasional contracts of ancillary kinds and the apprenticeship contract.

It is with the 2012 Fornero law that the circle of precarisation comes to its close: In the provision just approved the total liberalisation of limited-period contracts is posited, also eliminating clauses regulating their justification and the reduction of obligations regarding apprenticeship contracts (it is no longer necessary to confirm the old apprentices in order to hire new ones), establishing an untenable control and blackmail power over the labour force and its capacity to organise itself; an exemption of up to three years for contributions paid by companies for limited-period contracts, thus recuperating the lack of intake from the funds for supporting employment of youth and women. There is no reduction of the more than 40 forms of labour contract now in force. The law includes the elimination of just cause in firings (the de facto dismantling of Article 18); the drastic reduction of the redundancy fund; an absurd broadening of the recipients of unemployment benefits through the ASPI (Assicurazione sociale per l'impiego, or Social Insurance for Employment), starting however only in 2017, by reducing its length of disbursement and leaving intact the access criteria (in fact eliminating the possibility of precarious workers using it). Finally, there is insistence on that policy of two periods which has always characterised interventions in the labour market: The first period for precarisation, to be put up with in the name of competitiveness, in order to get, in a second period (which never comes), a minimum of social security. In the 1980s, the demand was to favour growth in employment; in the period of Treu, entrance into Europe, and now the reduction of the public deficit in order to manage the economic crisis. We know how it will end: Even now precarisation and the future crumbs of social security cushions promised will not trigger any virtuoso performance in the Italian economy. If one wanted to get out of the crisis, it would be wiser to operate in the reverse order: first guarantee social security, stabilise incomes, reduce social dumping, favour access to basic services, invert the

unjust distribution of income, in order to favour the growth of social productivity – and only then intervene, if necessary, in the labour market, founding it not on the compulsion to work but on freedom of choice.

The result is the current coexistence of more than 40 contract types, among them dependent labour, para-subordinate and autonomous. The distinction of late Fordist memory between dependent and independent labour thus loses any meaning in the face of today's contract flexibility.

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Added to this classification of jobs based on contracts is one based on ethnicity, in relation to provisions regulating immigrant labour.

In the Bossi-Fini law, the legal residence of the immigrant on national territory is dependent on the existence of a 'work contract'. The existence of a job relationship is the main condition for obtaining a 'stay contract', that is, to be recognised as a subject for whom civil rights obtain (even if only political ones). In such a way, the stay permit, which Hannah Arendt defined the 'right to have rights', inasmuch as it is a passport to social and civil visibility, is tied to a private contract which is entered into in the labour market: a private contract inasmuch as the stay contract, not being unlimited, provides for the individual ownership of a temporary job relation. It is easy to imagine how such a situation makes the immigrant blackmailable and how the employer can have under his power not only immigrant labour power but also its citizenship condition.

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Finally, we have to stress that we are in the course of a transition from the Taylorist division of labour to a cognitive one. In this framework, productive efficiency no longer rests on the reduction of necessary labour time for each task but is founded on knowledge and the versatility of a labour force capable of maximising the capacity for apprenticeship, innovation and adaptation to a dynamic of continuous change. We note that, beyond the paradigmatic model of the superior services and high-tech activities of the new economy, the spread of knowledge production and of information processing concerns all economic sectors, including those with low technology intensity. An illustration is the general progression of indicators of labour autonomy. Certainly, this tendency is not unambiguous. Within a single sector, certain phases of the productive process can be organised according to cognitive principles, while other phases of production (above all the more standardised industrial operations) can remain based on an organisation of work of the Taylorist or neo-Taylorist type. Nonetheless, both on the qualitative and quantitative level (at least in the OECD countries) it is cognitive labour that is at the centre of the process of capital valorisation – and which therefore holds the power to break, possibly, with the mechanisms of capitalist production.

This tends to highlight new forms of segmentation and division of labour, which the development of new atypical contracts and the classic Smithian division (of tasks) are not able to accommodate or grasp. In particular, at a very embryonic level we are referring to the division between access to codified and standardised knowledge and access to implicit knowledge. The former today, precisely because it is transmittable through information technology, can do without a specific human activity, with induces a process of de-valorisation of this type of cognitive labour, while the latter, being exclusive in its nature (therefore the prerogative of few) develops a contractual power in the exchange of labour (once recognised), which tends to overvalue it.

It therefore becomes necessary to investigate the fundamental characteristics of cognitive-relational labour.

#### **4. The characteristics of cognitive-relational labour**

The concept of 'cognitive-relational labour' – as with any recent concept – has so far been defined in different ways, which inevitably creates misunderstandings and contradictions. The literature,

increasingly voluminous, has until now sought more to clarify what cognitive-relational labour is rather than draw up its constituent parameters. It is therefore not surprising that there is no clarity around the use of terms such as ‘intellectual labour’, ‘immaterial labour’ or ‘digital labour’.

In this paragraph we will try to define the concept of cognitive-relational labour and to identify some variable that can be useful in defining its content.

a. *Reflectivity*: For ‘cognitive-relational labour’ we mean labour that is invested with reflectivity: The latter transforms the organisational and procedural structure through which it is carried out and, in doing so, generates new knowledge.

b. *Relationality*: Cognitive-relational labour requires relational activity, as an instrument for transmitting and decoding one’s own activity and accumulated knowledge. It follows that by its very nature, it is hard to homogenise, in so far as it is bio-economic, that is, dependent on the individual biology of the subject. Cognitive capacities and relational activities are inseparable from one another.

c. *Spatiality and reticularity*: In order for cognitive-relational labour to become productive it needs ‘space’, that is, it has to develop a network of relations: otherwise, if it remains incorporated in the individual it becomes an end in itself, perhaps an individual process of valorisation but not an exchange value for the accumulation of wealth, that is not a ‘commodity’. Cognitive capitalism is necessarily reticular, that is, it is non-linear, and the hierarchies that it develops are internal to the individual nodes among the diverse nodes of the net. It is a question of complex hierarchies and often linked to factors of social control of the space within it develops (Manuel Castells, 2003).

d. *Education and apprenticeship*: Cognitive-relational labour requires a process of apprenticeship and education. This apprenticeship increasingly requires the possession of information and knowledge that derive from the development of forms of relational communication and from the accumulation of expertise. From this point of view, education and apprenticeship are not synonymous. Education describes the process on the basis of which the subject comes into possession of the basic information which define the ‘toolbox’, that is the ‘know where’, or where to draw the knowledge indispensable for performing the labour task. Apprenticeship, on the other hand, is developed through experiential activity necessary to develop the proficiency of ‘know how’ in a specialised way. Education can be external to the labour process; apprenticeship, on the other hand, occurs within direct participation in the very labour process.

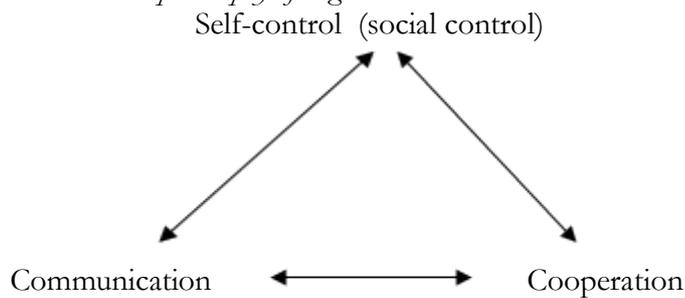
e. *Coordination*: Cognitive-relational labour requires, as has been said, insertion into a reticular (virtual or real) structure, where communication among the various nodes is eminently a linguistic and symbolic communication. This implies that, in contrast to the Taylorist system, the forms of coordination are not incorporated into the mechanical means (which by definition are external to human action) but depend on the type of extant human interactions and relations and consequently can give rise equally to forms of hierarchy and forms of cooperation.

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In a context of cognitive bio-capitalism, the organisation of labour is studied with a view to pushing the communication and cooperation which digital technologies require as far as they can go. In this respect, the dialectical triad of cognitive-relational labour is: communication, cooperation, self-control (or social control).

The action of communication is linked to the use of language (human and/or artificial), while the activity of cooperation is implicit in the bilateral relation that is at the bottom of linguistic communication (one does not speak alone). The essence of linguistic activity is coagulated in this activity, understood as antithesis. In this case it is a matter of cooperation understood not as a disjointed succession of single operations but as an amalgam of multilateral relations characterised by various degrees of hierarchy, whose outcome does not equal the simple sum of the individual instances. To be more specific, from the moment in which the activity of cooperation is the result of forms of communication, it is characterised by being directly immaterial cooperation, even if it has material production as its object. The activity of cooperation is the constitutive element of the network structure of the production chain.

Fig 1: The dialectic and philosophy of cognitive-relational labour



Self-control also becomes a form of social control as soon as it is activated by the imitation of collective behaviours prescribed by the common and dominant imaginary. In any case, it is the single individual who, through forms of self-control or self-repression, adjusts his own behaviour in such a way that it fits the requirements of productive organisation.

The five parameters we have listed as the basis of the definition of cognitive-relational labour imply that we are simultaneously in the presence of social cooperation and hierarchies. Social cooperation derives from the need for coordination, reticularity and relationality. The hierarchy arises from the diverse forms of apprenticeship and education which give life to a cognitive division of labour, from which the segmentation of cognitive-relational labour is born, also facilitated by the fact that the reflectivity of cognitive-relational labour itself favours the spread of cumulative paths of knowledge of an individual type.

Social cooperation and the individuality of the performance of cognitive labour – these are the two sides that make up the paradox of modern cognitive-relational work: the need to develop a general intellect as the fruit of social cooperation which at the same time defines hierarchical structures that find the source of their spread in the individualisation of the labour relation.

It follows that in cognitive bio-capitalism the performance of labour resists any form of unambiguous and homogeneous definition. If we have to use a synthetic expression, we could affirm that labour, in the material forms it assumes, is today characterised by the attribute of differences. With this term I would like to suggest that today the concept of the performance of labour is founded on the uniqueness of every expenditure of labour power, which cannot be assimilated to a type, to a contractual, qualitatively unique or dominant form. We cannot speak of difference in the singular, that is, of a binary relation (man-woman, manual-intellectual, worker-office staff, etc.), rather of a plurality of differences, that is of a multitude: an apparently chaotic multitude of labour forms. It is differences which constitute cognitive labour power in the current phase of capitalism. And it is precisely the exploitation of these differences and their material declension that determines the new forms of capital-labour relation.

### **The populism of precarity**

In conclusion, precarity today is an existential, subjective, structural and generalised condition.

Precarity is juridically defined by the contractual types underlying it. Such definitions, which normally are those more commonly used to define a situation of precarity, are inadequate for grasping the complexity of the phenomenon.

Last but not least, the framework described is further complicated by the rise of processes of segmentation of labour on the basis of the different accesses to the different forms of knowledge (from simple information, today increasingly ‘mechanised’, to specialised knowledge (*know-how*), to systematic knowledge (*know-that*)). In the light of these differences, precarious subjectivities arise, which derive directly from the processes of segmentation and of control of the educative and formative process.

The condition of precarity is therefore a highly subjective condition, although it presents elements of transversality which concern all the performance of living labour considered here. It presents a series of elements common to all these activities:

- The common difficulty of calculating exactly the length of working time. Even if in many jobs, on the basis of the collective contracts (for example, in the case of dependent work, either permanent or for limited time periods), the work schedule is defined, it is in fact highly variable according to the needs of the productive cycle. In the case of standard work, this variability is in great part determined by the recourse to overtime or to forms of redundancy fund, above all in periods of crisis. On the other hand, where individual contracting prevails, working time becomes in fact indefinable on a daily basis. In para-subordinate and autonomous working locations, moreover, not even in a time span that goes beyond the single day is it possible to define precisely the temporal duration of the work performed. In work performed with greater cognitive-relational content, finally even the time which juridically cannot be considered work time (travel time, lunch break, happy hour, etc.) becomes concretely a time of productive life.

- The common tendency to devalue work performed. Various journalistic investigations have shown that for some time now there has been a convergence underway toward a calculation of an hour's work at 5 Euros. This remuneration equates immigrant labour in agriculture and construction to caregiving work, and work in large-scale retail (with the fragmentation of working time into several daily and/or weekly turns) to that in the immaterial services sector (from publishing to university research and communication).

- The increasing common difficulty in having access to forms of social security through recourse to security cushions. The latter are increasingly restricted to fewer labour types (dependents of medium- to large-size enterprises with a stable employment history) at the expense of the types emerging now in the labour market, characterised by atypical contracts, which can scarcely benefit from any form of parachute in terms of income and/or social security, if they do not resort to forms of private social insurance, if they have sufficient income to do so (which applies only to a minority).

In spite of this tendency to homogenisation, the condition of precarity is usually perceived in a subjective-individual way. What common life prospects, fulfilment and struggle could be shared by the immigrant who picks tomatoes and the young person with fine hopes who enters into the world of publishing or university research, even if both only earn 5 Euros an hour, work all day long and are therefore associated through the same intensive and extensive process of exploitation? The subjectivities involved are so different in terms of their imaginations, projections and relative needs that it is very difficult for a mechanism of social and political homogenisation to get underway, which starts from the simple condition of work. If in the Fordist epoch, the condition of working was what unified labour's diverse subjectivities regardless of their origin and status, today it is the exact opposite that is occurring: The flexible and nomadic condition of work increases and fragments the differences between the labour subjectivities.

In this context individualistic choice rules. And it is from individualist opportunism that populist-demagogic tendencies can emerge.

In a recent book<sup>14</sup> Guy Standing holds that precarity, not being able to define itself as a 'class' because it is too fragmented and heterogeneous, is rather a 'class-in-the-making, not yet a class-for-itself', in the Marxian sense of the term.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, according to Standing, precarity can be defined on the basis of some elements that characterise it in a homogeneous way. There are four such – the four A's: 'anger, anomie, anxiety, alienation'. These represent the precariat's frustration within processes of individualisation of work, which intensify this frustration. And it is from the analysis of this psycho-physical component that we understand the book's subtitle: 'the dangerous class'. Indeed, according to Standing, the diverse components of the precariat – from immigrants to women who do care work, to farmers expropriated from their land, to workers exploited in 'sweatshops' in the western and eastern parts of the world, to precarious workers of the material service sectors (from transportation to shopping centres) and the immaterial ones (from the call centres to the universities and publishing sectors) – are inserted into a context of harsh competition and social dumping promoted by that 'politics of inferno' that the neoliberal policy makers have fomented as an instrument

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<sup>14</sup>See Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, Bloomsbury: London, 2011.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

of division and control. In this context, racist, nihilist and corporative phenomena are the order of the day and hinder the development of a consciousness and subjectivisation such that the precariat transforms itself into a true social class: 'The precariat is not a class-for-itself because it is in part at war with itself'.<sup>16</sup>

The context of the current economic crisis sharpens these contradictions. History teaches us that it is difficult for processes of social transformation to occur when workers can easily be blackmailed and are more dependent. In crisis phases, tumult is more likely than revolutions. And often, in the face of the need to survive, social dumping policies gain the upper hand over policies of social progress. This appears all the more dramatically true today when after 20 years of neoliberal cultural hegemony, above all in the field of economic regulation (or, better, of socio-economic 'deregulation') the only hope held out to the single individual for at least treading water lies in the oppression of those most similar and near to him/her. The condition of precarity is very susceptible to this perspective especially where traditional forms of political and trade union representation have proven inadequate if not deaf to the satisfaction of the needs of the precarious and the call for support and aid.

If to this we add the fact that precarity is also a matter of 'consensus' in terms of a subaltern acceptance of individualistic ideas based on personal capacity, on competition falsely held to be meritocratic and on the myth of success, it is not surprising that populist and demagogic politics which exalt individualism succeed in taking root to the point of reaching levels not distant from racist practices and social Darwinism.

What is therefore involved is a dangerous populism which becomes greater the more the issue of precarity becomes common in the pages of mainstream periodicals. In this respect it is interesting to note how the media reports this phenomenon. Rarely in the pages of daily newspapers and in television programmes (though there are some exceptions) is the figure of the precarious worker described as what he/she really is: a potentially 'powerful' figure, rich in possibilities, more woman than man, more educated than less educated, more integrated into cognitive-relational labour than into traditionally industrial labour. If there is a narration, it stresses the wretched and pathetic side, a narrative more about 'rotten bad luck' and 'impotence' than of 'possibility'. This image too is the result of a certain populism, a populism which we can define as a 'left' populism<sup>17</sup> no less noxious than that of the 'right', both of which share a sense of irremediable resignation.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>17</sup>See Sergio Bianchi (ed.), *La sinistra populista*, Castelveccchi: Rome, 1995.

## The extreme right and right-wing populism in Germany

Gerd Wiegel

In the debate about right-wing populism in Europe Germany plays a special role compared to most of its neighbours in Western and Southern Europe. Currently there is no successful right-wing populist party. With the exception of the short-term success of a regional party in Hamburg (the so-called *Schill* party), which managed to achieve 22 percent during the regional elections and became one of the coalition partners in the Federal State of Hamburg, there is no political party with such an orientation in Germany. What are the reasons for this? And why are there no signs that any such political party might be founded, although there is a potential of right-wing populist ideas within the German public?

The biggest extreme right political party in Germany is still the NPD. This is the party of the “old” extreme right fascist orientation. They oppose the democratic system and follow the model of National Socialism. My hypothesis is that this political party will not have any real chance of coming to power in the foreseeable future.

The German political scientist Richard Stöss has defined three different types of extreme right political parties: (slide)

### Type 1:

Political parties which are moderately nationalistic and xenophobic and which are inclined to conform with the system. They cooperate with liberal and conservative political parties, but not with parties of the type 2 or 3.

Examples: SVP (Switzerland), Gert Wilders, DF (Denmark)

### Type 2:

Nationalist populist political parties, which criticize the democratic system. They set themselves apart from the parties of type 1. Frequently, they also set themselves apart from parties of the type 3, however only verbally.

Examples: FN (France), Vlams Belang, Lega Nord, FPÖ

### Type 3:

(Neo-)fascist or (neo-)racist political parties. They oppose the system, do not cooperate with the parties of type 1, but have a certain affinity with parties of type 2.

Examples: Jobbik (Hungary), Forza Nuova (Italy), BNP (GB), NPD (Germany).

Possible allies for conservative and liberal parties are only the political parties of the type 1 (and to a limited degree) of type 2. The most successful political parties of the European right-wing populism are all parties of the type 1 and 2. In Germany, however, we are confronted with NPD, the neofascist party. For approximately 10 years now, the NPD has been the most successful extreme right-wing political party in German elections, however at a very small level.

Let us now take a short look at NPD as the most important political party of the extreme right in Germany and let me try and answer the question as to why this most modern variant of the extreme, right-wing populism has not managed to gain a foothold in Germany.

## NPD

For many decades, the extreme right was strongly divided in Germany. At least three political parties competed during elections and tried to cater for the small number Germans willing to vote for an extreme right party. During the 80ies, the “Republikaner” were relatively successful and represented the strongest party of this political spectrum. They achieved their biggest success in 1989 during the Germany-wide elections to the European Parliament with 7.1 percent of the votes. Since the middle of the 90ies, the “Republikaner” experienced a continuous decline. Today, the party is almost insignificant.

The Deutsche Volksunion (DVU), which was founded in 1987 as a party project, was the biggest party of this political spectrum in the 90ies with approximately 20,000 members. With certain exceptions, the party has never been very successful during elections. The NPD is the oldest extreme right political party in Germany. It was founded in 1964 and in the 60ies it was represented in the

parliaments of seven German Federal States. However, the number dropped from the more than 20,000 members in the 60ies to only some 2,000 members in the 80ies. Since the middle of the Nineties the NPD has experienced a revival and by now, the party has clearly overtaken its two competitors and has swallowed DVU.

In two German Federal States, the NPD is represented with political groups in Parliament (Saxony and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania). In both these Federal States, the party managed to receive the necessary number of votes in order to be represented in Parliament. During the last German elections the party achieved a 1.5% share of the vote.

The NPD is a political party with the clear intention of overcoming parliamentary democracy. The party stands for a populist, racially motivated nationalism and is in favour of a return of Germany to a policy of hegemony in Europe. In brief: the NPD still stands in the tradition of German fascism. Such a party is fundamentally different to the parties of successful right-wing populism in Europe. Of course, there are things that the NPD has in common with these parties: for example, ethnopluralism, the ethnicization of social issues, nationalism etc. However, NPD stands for a radical type of the extreme right, which is much more successful in neighbouring Western European countries.

NPD currently has approximately 6,000 members, and the numbers seem to be falling further. The organization is particularly strong in the East German Federal States. In Saxony, in particular, but also in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and in Thuringia the party is relatively strong. Here, the party has managed to be represented in local councils and to be recognized as a “normal” political party.

As far as the party programme is concerned, the NPD focuses on three main topics, which all go back to the fundamental convictions of a populist nationalism. Since the beginning of the new millennium the NPD has discovered social issues. The party stands for a racially motivated anticapitalism. NPD is opposed to globalisation which, they say, is dominated by Jewish-US-Americans. The party is against Germany giving up any type of national sovereignty rights. As a result, the NPD is opposed to a further European integration and wants Germany to leave the European Union.

The most successful campaign of NPD was launched at a time when the German coalition government of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party applied drastic cuts in social services at the beginning of the new millennium. At the time, the NPD tried, with a certain degree of success, to participate in the protest movement against these laws. For some years now, the NPD has deliberately been focusing on topics which left parties normally stand for (social matters, peace) and the party regards sees itself as directly competing with the party DIE LINKE. In East Germany in particular, the two parties are indeed competing for the votes of a similar group of voters, although DIE LINKE has many more voters representing a broader spectrum. The core group of NPD voters is represented by young men, who are either unemployed or who are in atypical employment contracts (slide). If the party DIE LINKE did not exist, which is the strongest party in this group of voters at least in East Germany, the NPD would probably have a much bigger group of voters.

The central topic of NPD continues to be immigration. All social, economic, demographic or environmental problems are related to immigration. NPD stands for a classical racist view of things, although it is hidden behind the buzzwords of ethnopluralism. In order to assess the party it is important to understand that it continues to mobilize many people by glorifying fascism. Ever since Udo Voigt became the party leader in 1999, the NPD has been cooperating with the entire spectrum of neo-Nazis who are also willing to use violence. This will not change with the new party leader of the NPD, Holger Apfel, who was elected in November 2011. Some neo-Nazis who are willing to use violence are even represented in city councils and in the parliaments of Federal States.

Maybe some of you have heard about the series of murders which were committed by neo-Nazis in Germany. This was discovered in November 2011. Nine migrants and one police officer were killed between 2001 and 2007 by a fascist terror group. In none of these cases the state authorities thought that the murders were racially motivated or that it was a series of racially motivated killings. The murders had been committed by a group of three right wing extremists. Some of the people who had supported them and who have now been arrested have had close ties with the NPD and were political cadres of the party.

So far, all the democratic parties have agreed that any cooperation with NPD must be refused. In

the Parliaments of the Federal States where the NPD is represented with a political group, all the other parties have agreed on how to deal with the NPD. This consensus is at risk because of the Christian Democratic Party, the CDU, which has been utilising the theory of extremism in order to put NPD and DIE LINKE on the same level.

### **There is also a potential for right-wing populism in Germany**

Although the NPD has not managed to become a mainstream party and to reach the political elite, in Germany the ideological requirements exist for a successful right-wing populism. Numerous empirical studies have proven time and again that many Germans share the thoughts and attitudes which are typical for right-wing populism. Refusal of the political system, nationalism, racism, authoritarianism – many Germans share these views.

Traditionally speaking, in Germany the Christian Democratic Party has played the role of covering the right margin of the political spectrum. With an ever stronger de-ideologisation of politics, it is getting more and more difficult to distinguish between the big political parties. Under Angela Merkel's chancellorship the CDU has had growing difficulties to include the right or the conservative wing. The CDU is continuously losing support. However, it must be added that many former voters do not move over to the political competition but move away from the political system altogether, i.e. chose not to go to the polls at all. Surveys have shown that there is a potential of up to 20% of votes for a party on the right of CDU. However, there is no political offer for these voters. One thing is certain: The NPD does not represent this offer.

Unlike in the majority of Western and Southern European neighbouring states, it has not been possible in Germany to establish a modern party right of the CDU. There are potential voters and there are many Germans whose attitudes match the ideas of right populist political party. But there is no political party to cater for these voters. Let me explain some reasons why I believe this is.

First of all in Germany, there is no charismatic figure amongst the extreme right, which would make such a party appealing also to the bourgeois middle-class. In Germany there are no personalities in sight such as Jörg Haider, Geert Wilders or even Umberto Bossi. Politicians who could play this role, do not take the step of launching a party project. There are structural and historical reasons for this.

In Germany, any right-wing party is confronted with the questions of how it relates to historic fascism. Up until today the memory of the crimes committed by fascism still represents one of the most effective barriers against any successful right-wing extremism. All the attempts at establishing a political party further to the right of the CDU have failed due to this stigmatization, i.e. the identification with historical fascism. This is one of the main reasons why many potential leaders of a successful right-wing populism in Germany shy away from the idea of founding a political party. The risk is very big that someone like this would be discredited in German society.

Another reason is represented by the relatively high hurdles which exist for a newly founded political party in Germany. The federal structure of the German state make it necessary for a political party to establish properly functioning regional structures at the level of the Länder, in order to be able to operate successfully in the whole country. This represents a big hurdle for a new political party.

I believe that right-wing populism in Germany will have a chance, if it manages to convert an existing established political party into a right-wing populist project. The liberal democratic party, the FDP could become such a transformation project for right-wing populism. There have been various attempts to launch a national liberal project within the FDP. The most recent attempt was made during the elections in Berlin in 2011, where the FDP tried to capitalize on the general negative atmosphere against the European Union during the Eurozone crisis. But the party failed in their attempt. If the FDP does not manage to take the 5% hurdle during the next parliamentary elections and will not be represented in Parliament, the party could become a field of experimentation for right-wing populism. I do not believe, however, that they will fail to be make it into Parliament.

Another important question for the success of right-wing populism is represented by the role of the left-wing movement and of the party DIE LINKE in particular in this context. The party DIE LINKE is an important barrier to right-wing populism in general, just as it is an important barrier to the NPD. During the last federal elections DIE LINKE received many votes from people who are considered to

be turned off by politics and who were in the process of turning away from the politics. As a new, radical player which is opposed to the system, DIE LINKE has had an appeal to groups of voters who are considered to be classical voters of right-wing populism. The more DIE LINKE loses this role in the perception of the voters, the stronger the party will enable right-wing populism (and to a less extent the NPD) to cater for those who have so far voted for DIE LINKE, if a right wing party project were launched in the foreseeable future.

## Italy: The Northern League and Berlusconi's Populism

Roberto Biorcio

With the economic crisis and its effects on democracies (and also on non-democratic countries), the political/social context and structure of political opportunities for party and movement activism, and for citizens' participation, are changing rapidly. There has been the dramatic re-emergence of the social and labour question, the defence of welfare systems, the question of the future of young people and the perception of a lack of representation in all of the democracies. New movements of *indignados* are arising in Europe and the US, and we have seen a rebirth of trade-union mobilisations as well as youth and student protests in many countries. In the face of the crisis and the failure of parties to live up to their responsibilities, we frequently see citizen activism with mobilisations aimed at affecting decision-making processes that increasingly elude democratic legitimation.

In this context, populist parties, which have met with success in the last 20 years in Europe, can find new opportunities. The question takes on particular significance in Italy because populism has had more space there than in other countries, and parties and populist rhetoric have profoundly conditioned politics.

Populism has appeared historically in many different forms, according to the particular periods and national contexts. Of course, there is no organic and unique ideological development, but we can identify some common features that characterise all the political formations historically defined as populist (Ionescu and Gellner 1969, Mény and Surel 2000, Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008). The interpretative framework put forward by these formations is always centred on the opposition between the people and the dominant elites. The people, imagined as a homogeneous social unit, is considered the font of all positive values: 'Virtue resides in the authentic people which constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population and its collective traditions (Ionescu and Gellner, 23). In turn, it sees as potential 'enemies of the people' not only the political, economic and financial elites, but also all subjects considered external to the people.

These contents can be elaborated and put forward in diverse forms connected to the nucleus of ideas that characterise populism. The possible proposals are differentiated either by the way the idea of people as an 'imagined community' is developed or the elite and the 'enemies of the people' represented. The three classic versions of the concept of people are: the 'sovereign people' evoked as the holder of popular sovereignty; the people as nation characterised by specific ethnic and cultural features; the people as class, that is, the popular sectors counterposed to the elites (Mény and Surel 2000). In general, contemporary populist parties tend to combine these three versions of the idea of people, giving more weight at different times to one or the other aspect in relation to the political conjunctures and diverse territorial contexts.

### 3. The rebirth of populism in Europe and Italy

In the last 20 years the rebirth of populism in Europe has not occurred within an isolated national context as in the past but has involved more than 20 countries. This is why it is not enough to reconstruct only the events that have fostered the rebirth of populism in Italy: The interpretation of this phenomenon requires a re-reading in a broader comparative framework. The preliminary problem to deal with therefore is why the last 20 years has seen the success of a family of parties in Europe, which are repropounding populist rhetoric. We can then ask ourselves why populism in Italy has had more space and weight than in other democratic countries, and why the parties and populist rhetoric have had a particular success that has deeply conditioned the politics of the Second Republic.

The populist right's opportunities for success in many European countries depend on variables that are relatively independent of ideological ones: the existence of specific social conditions and specific national political systems, which have created a potential space for populism, and the adoption of a style of action, communication and leadership that is very effective in exploiting the opportunities the situation offers.

The favourable conditions for Europe's populist right were created by two combined processes. The

first is the crisis of mass parties and the transformation of the traditional systems of representation. An epoch-making transition from the 'democracy of parties' to a new form of representative government – defined as the 'democracy of the public' (Manin 1995) or 'post-democracy' (Crouch 2003) – in which political organisations increasingly count for less and the media and personalities of leaders count for more. A vacuum was created in the relation between political elites and citizens now compelled to take cognizance of decisions taken 'elsewhere' by political and economic protagonists who act without taking account of popular sovereignty.

The second process is the development of globalisation, which has provoked rapid changes in all national contexts: the crisis of welfare systems, the dismantling of whole industrial sectors, the spread of unemployment and the increasingly explosive growth of immigration. Problems have therefore emerged, new questions and social fractures, which the main parties, in government or opposition, are not able to represent or manage. These problems became more acute after 2008 due to the effects of the global economic crisis, which the national states find very difficult to deal with.

The development of two processes have created a structure of political opportunities favourable to the rebirth of populism in Europe and in particular in Italy. The vacuum left behind by the dissolution of the mediation function performed by large mass parties was able to be filled in two different ways. One was to intensify the tendencies underway, increasingly entrusting to the media the function of communicating with citizens and using the mediated relationship to the leader to replace the activism of parties in the particular territory. This was the strategy of 'media populism' personified in Italy by Berlusconi.

A second possibility was that of opposing this tendency, building new political subjects in order to fulfil functions in national territories similar to those of traditional parties, giving expression to protests and citizens' demands. Working within this perspective, new populist parties, acting like civil-society protest movements, have been successful in many European countries, but they have also been able to utilise all the opportunities offered by the electoral-representative channel (Taggart 1996, Mény and Surel 2000, Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008).

These formations can be considered a new family of parties, as they have developed a similar model of communication and political action, effectively exploiting three potential conflict areas:

- The first is the management of anti-politics, of the increasingly widespread criticism of representative institutions and the main political protagonists. As an alternative, these populist formations advocate direct and plebiscitary democracy, occurring in reality through entrusting their leaders with the role of interpreters of authentic popular democracy.

- The second area is the exploiting of hostilities towards immigrants. A crucial role is assigned to the foreigner (who can take on the features of the Roma, of the different and deviant, etc.) in order to catalyse fear, insecurity and popular resentment.

- The third area of effort is the defence of the national (or regional or local) communities against the process of European integration and against the effects of globalisation. New populist leaders in general share the principles of economic liberalism, but do not question the need for social protection. However, the latter are reserved for the local communities and indigenous popular strata, excluding only immigrants.

In Italy, the spread of this orientation has interacted with a political system characterised by the traditional lack of civic culture, by territorial imbalances, by an intense ideologising of the social conflict. Up to the 1980s, Italy's political system had offered very limited opportunities for the spread of populism, even if there were some protest experiences. Protest movements against the 'partocracy' – and often against politics tout court – appeared in different moments of tension in the system of representation. In the immediate post-war years, Giannini's Uomo Qualunque movement ('Ordinary Man Movement') expressed an unease and disaffection among broad sectors of the southern Italian electorate toward the protagonists of the fledgling democracy. At the end of the 1970s, protest against the parties resulted in a sudden rise of votes for Pannella's Radical Party. Up to the 1990s, however, the anti-politics experiences did not play an important and lasting role in Italy's political system because they were not able to transform protest into loyalty to a new mass party based on a strong identity. A

great part of the electorate in all geographic areas declared they felt a strong identification with a political force (see Figure 1). The share of the electorate that felt a strong or substantial sense of closeness to a political party initially fell (from the 1960s to the 1970s) and then suffered a genuine collapse at the end of the 1980s. The crisis of identification with a party, recorded in 1990, did not homogeneously characterise all political spheres but was seen above all among centrist and Catholic voters.

The left- or right- oriented sections of the electorate underwent a more limited crisis in their relations with the parties of their political sectors. Catholic voters, on the other hand, were already increasingly sceptical of the Christian Democratic Party (DC) before its dissolution. Therefore the crisis of relationship between citizens and parties in the early 1990s mainly involved the 'white' regions and was less marked in the traditional 'red zones'. These tendencies are also confirmed by data on party memberships (see Figure 2). Memberships literally crumbled in the mid-1990s, thus reflecting and intensifying the drop in the sense of party identification registered a bit earlier in the Italian electorate as a whole. The reasons for this crisis of relationship between citizens and parties were many, from impatience with a democracy that seemed blocked, to the increasing mistrust of the political class, to the disappearance of the international conditioning based on the Cold War.

#### **4. The regionalist populism of the Northern League**

In Italy, the space that opened up in the 1980s for populist agitation and politics was much broader than that of other European countries. This political space was, however, not exploited by the Italian Social Movement (MSI), the right-wing party close to the French Front National in terms of historical referents and ideological tradition. In the context of the crisis of the First Republic, the MSI, in fact, moved towards the positions of Europe's moderate right-wing parties. If the party had tried to conduct a populist mobilisation analogous to that of the Front National it would have been stopped by the still widespread memory of the anti-fascist resistance.

The available space for populist mobilisation in Italy was discovered and used by the Northern League, a regionalist formation unrelated to the bigger political traditions. The same political space was then used successfully, but with other means and strategies, by the commercial television tycoon Silvio Berlusconi.

The Northern League was founded at the end of the 1980s with the confluence of different autonomist leagues, which took as their ideal frame of reference the regionalist and ethno-nationalist movements of other European countries.<sup>18</sup> However, the ethno-cultural differences between the regions of northern Italy, on the one hand, and those of other Italian regions are in reality very limited: The simple claim to regional belonging and the demands for autonomy for the North were not enough to guarantee significant electoral support. In the first half of the 1990s, the League succeeded in establishing itself, first in Lombardy and then in the other regions of northern Italy because it had transformed regionalist protest into a general battle against Rome's partocracy. The goal of autonomy for all northern regions was presented as the most radical way of liquidating the power of the traditional parties and the state bureaucracy. Regionalism was transformed into regionalist populism (Biorcio 1991, Diani 1996, McDonnell 2006). By counterposing the populations of northern Italy and the centralist state it was possible to express both the resentment for the political peripherality of Italy's economically most developed regions and the existing tensions between the great majority of citizens and the political parties in government, linked to public and private big capital. The League was thus able to translate into electoral consensus the disaffection and protest of public opinion much more effectively than other competing formations because it had connected the struggle against partocracy to the defence of concrete interests and above all to the construction of an identity-based frame of reference different from the traditional political ones.

The first wave of the League's electoral growth culminated in 1992 when Umberto Bossi's party became the second largest party in the northern regions reaching for the first time 17.3% of votes. The

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<sup>18</sup>The Northern League was constituted in December 1989 with an agreement between the Lombard League and the leagues of the Veneto, Piedmont, Liguria, Emilia Romagna and Tuscany.

DC's predominance, and that of its allies in the northern regions, was sharply reduced. Bossi's party thus took on a fundamental role in launching and characterising the present historical 'cycle of anti-politics' (Mastropaolo 2000) which triggered the crisis of First Republic and the dissolution of the traditional system of Italian parties between 1992 and 1994.

Bossi's party reached its highest levels of electoral approval outside the metropolitan areas, in contexts marked by the presence of small businesses and above all in the geographic areas most influenced by the 'white' [in contrast to 'red' or left] subculture (Diamanti 1993). In these areas the Carroccio<sup>19</sup> replaced the DC in the role of party of reference for the representation of the interests of the local communities. It can be observed how, beyond the differences between regions, the ups and downs in approval levels in northern regions indicate the three waves of the League so far recorded (see Figure 3). In expansion phases the League's votes grew in all regions, while they fell concurrent with the phases of decline and stagnation (Biorcio 2010). The three expansion waves developed in very different contexts of political and social opportunity, and they had different effects, which were always very important in terms of Italy's political system.

The regionalist populism put forward by Umberto Bossi is characterised by an appeal to the people understood both as *demos* (the people as a whole and at the same time the common people, the plebs, the popular masses counterposed to the elites) and as *ethnos* (the people as an ethno-national or ethno-regional entity). The effective management of this formula has been the basis of the League's success as it has been for all European populist parties because it has connected the pole of popular protest with that of identity (Mény and Surel 2000, Taguieff 2002).

The League's populism has sought to occupy the vacuum left by the mass parties. In a phase in which politics is increasingly crushed by the relation between the media circus and the institutions, the League has developed its project above all in its geographic territory, with flesh-and-blood activists and interlocutors who interact in the framework of real contexts and communities. Bossi has built a centralised party that performs many of the functions of traditional mass parties. The League has created an organisational structure based on a relatively modest number of ordinary activist members who are concretely engaged in garnering the approval and support of the local populations for their political project. In small centres, as in the neighbourhoods of the large cities, small groups of League members operate, who set up literature stands to gather signatures in support of their own initiatives or to build referendum participation on various questions of local interest. These initiatives meet with strong support from the network of League members who are public administrators. The latter call the attention of local media through their often provocative interventions. In practice, League members clearly exhibit one of the features that characterises all populist formations: the tendency to put themselves forward as the *unique* and *exclusive* vehicle for the expression of the popular will. The rank-and-file sections are moreover very attentive to changes in the public's mood and opinions.

## 5. Berlusconi's media populism

The Northern League's successes at the beginning of the 1990s created the most favourable political framework and climate of opinion for Berlusconi's arrival on the scene. In this context, the president of Mediaset [Berlusconi] was able to use populist rhetoric very effectively and to recover a good part of the political space available for the mobilisation of anti-politics.

Berlusconi's political offensive originated from the heart of commercial television and succeeded in using an effective communicative strategy for overcoming the distance between political leaders and citizens, which – in contrast to the League's strategy – above all was not directed to specific social and territorial spheres but to the undifferentiated public of the most popular television broadcasts. As was the case with Bossi, Berlusconi's many violations of the rules of language, of the practice and interpretative schemes of traditional politics, underscored his distance from the ruling class of Italian parties. The diffuse criticism of the political class and the delegitimisation of the 'little theatre of politics' were presented again. The need to 'break' with the old regime was made to coincide with a

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<sup>19</sup>Translator's note: Carroccio – In the Middle Ages an oxen-drawn wagon carrying the symbols of a free town and brought into battlefields, used by the Northern League as their symbol.

generic polemic against the political elites and with the emptying out of values that had inspired the building of a democratic republic after the fall of fascism.

The figure of the new leader stressed the primacy of capacities exhibited outside the political arena, above all in the 'trenches of work'. He was thus able to stage the project of conquering political power on the part of a strong person in civil society.

Berlusconi was conscious that his entrance onto the scene could succeed in 1994 only if it was guaranteed by an alliance with the League. An alliance was necessary with a political force that was already successfully establishing itself in real elections, with which it was possible to share the elements of his criticism of traditional parties as well as the promises of a renewal of political life.

On the other hand, Berlusconi presented an archetype of Italian political tradition – the struggle against 'communism' – succeeding in involving the formations most distant from the system of the traditional parties: the MSI and the League. Forza Italia inherited more credibly than did the Northern League the role of heir to the role played in the past by the DC as the 'bulwark' against 'communism', a term by now taken up as a metaphor for any kind of intervention by 'politics' in the world of 'ordinary people'. Berlusconi's political engagement moreover had the effect of converting the television subculture of his own television networks into one that could be demarcated in relation to the culture of the left.

Berlusconi's arrival on the scene perhaps represented the most important example of that form of political mobilisation that has been called 'telepopulism' (Taguieff 2002): A leader located outside the political class spontaneously emerges in public space mainly using television to denounce the political elites in power, to offer himself personally as the guarantor of a true democracy, to promote strong image identifications and to promise the carrying out of concrete goals the people can dream about.<sup>20</sup>

Forza Italia was built mainly to be an efficient and flexible electoral committee for Berlusconi. It was possible to join it simply by agreeing with the appeal launched by the leader. Forza Italia cannot be compared to parties of the populist right and found its natural place among Europe's political formations of the centre right. However, Berlusconi's rhetoric contained two essential elements of populism: the direct appeal to the people, as the repository of virtue and authentic values, and the direct relationship between the people and leadership (Shils 1954, 27). Accordingly, the project tenaciously pursued by Berlusconi was that of transforming all electoral deadlines into a popular plebiscite on himself as a person in order to become invested as head of government.

The European populist parties have been successful in the transitional phase from the 'democracy of the parties' to a new regime dominated by media communication and the personalisation of politics. Berlusconi's media populism has successfully exemplified these tendencies, using all the tools of public-relations marketing. Forza Italia was initially seen as a temporary anomaly in Italian political life, a 'virtual party' or 'plastic party', unable to play an important and lasting role. In reality Berlusconi had launched in Italy, in an accelerated way, the process which in many European countries had already transformed the 'democracy of parties' into a 'democracy of the public' (Manin 1995). In its first years, Berlusconi's party took to the extreme, in an almost ideal typical form, the abandonment of the traditional political and organisational profile of political parties, with the substantial disappearance of the role of members and activists and a direct relationship between voters and the leader who avails himself of a restricted professional nucleus specialised in fundraising, communications and electoral campaign management. The other Italian political forces have also in many cases adjusted to these tendencies. The 'light' party, the 'personal' party, became increasingly widespread models as did also the prevalent use of media to communicate with the voters (Calise 2010).

## **6. Competition and complementarity of the two populisms**

In 1994, the alliance between the two populisms, represented by Berlusconi and the League, was very successful politically and electorally. However, there soon came to light many problems and difficulties due to the different phases of development of the two parties and the multiple and

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<sup>20</sup>Others who fit this category are Ross Perot in the United States, Stanislaw Tymínski in Poland, Bernard Tapié in France and Fernando Collor de Mellor in Brazil.

contradictory demands that the two populisms intended to represent. Berlusconi's personal role turned out to be so extreme as to partly absorb the ally's identity and programmatic contents, without he himself being conditioned in a significant way. The League broke the alliance and was able to grow electorally in 1996 criticising the bipolar logic which had begun to characterise Italy's political system. The struggle against partocracy was relaunched, distributing its attacks equally between centre right and centre left ('Roma-Polo'<sup>21</sup> and 'Roma Ulivo'). To contest bipolarism and affirm the difference of its own political project, federalism was abandoned in favour of independence (Biorcio 1997). The Carroccio thus reinforced its political identity, but it found itself politically isolated and its electoral approval sharply declined in the next years.

After 1996, Forza Italia's strength grew with the construction of a decentralised organisational structure and its entrance into the European Popular Party. However, Berlusconi believed that a new alliance with the League would be a decisive element of his own project's political success. This goal became a reality with the pact between Bossi and Berlusconi in 2000, which allowed the House of Freedoms (Casa delle Libertà, as Polo delle Libertà was renamed in 2000) to conquer the government next year. With this second victory in the political elections of the centre-right coalition the role and centrality of Berlusconi's leadership were established in a still clearer way, not only for his party but for all of the allied political forces. The name of the leader appeared in the very symbol of the House of Freedoms. In 2001 the League lost more than half of its electorate, while the role of Berlusconi's personal leadership was further confirmed. In 2008 the project was launched of creating a single party out of what had up to then been an alliance – the People of Freedom (Popolo delle Libertà, or PdL) was now to occupy the entire electoral space of the House of Freedoms. The new party included Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale along with other smaller forces. In this way the context of political opportunities for the Carroccio improved; it became Berlusconi's only ally in the northern regions. A third wave of electoral expansion for the League occurred from 2008 to 2010, which allowed the League to double its votes. The competition with the PdL for primacy in northern Italy grew. More than in federalism, which did not appear capable of mobilising public opinion, the League above all invested in the question of immigration. In public opinion, Bossi's party gradually (and intentionally) acquired the function of a 'bulwark' to brake the flow of immigration and the settling of immigrants on national territory.

The League has considerably broadened its influence on the popular level, above all among centre-right and right voters. With the Carroccio's alliance with the centre right and its political efforts around the question of immigration, the political profile of its electorate has changed. There has been considerable increase in the readiness to vote for the League among voters who define themselves as centre right and right, while there has been a significant drop in its centre and centre-left voters. The identification of a potential common 'enemy' (immigration) and the role played by the League in this sphere on the level of national government has favoured the League's expansion not only in all of the north but also in the traditional 'red regions'.

To make the idea of 'Padania' – the imagined community that represents a central element of its own identity – concrete, the League has been engaged in developing a sort of 'defensive patriotism' with variable geography. Starting with the opinions and fear widespread among people, Bossi's party has sought to offer proposals for fighting the effects of globalisation. To the processes of globalisation it counterposes the defence of communities based on local territories, of their interests, their culture and in general their traditional forms of life, including the Catholic religion. The central idea put forward is that of an 'invaded community', while slogans such as 'we give the orders in our own home' or 'masters of our house' project substantial differences between the rights of the 'masters of our house' and the more or less desirable 'guests'. All possible forms of resistance to the development of a multi-ethnic society are legitimated, as is the right of those who belong to the local community (and also to the region, to 'Padania' or to Italy), in relation to the immigrants, to primacy (or exclusivity) in terms of access to jobs, to social services and to public resources. It is the same idea that was invented

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<sup>21</sup>Translator's note: In 1994, the name of the electoral alliance between Forza Italia, the League, Alleanza Nazionale and others was the 'Pole of Freedoms'.

by Le Pen – the principle of ‘national primacy’ (‘les Français d’abord’). France’s Front National succeeded in this way in closely connecting the question of immigration and that of national identity, a strategy that showed itself to be very effective on the electoral level. The League presents this idea in a more flexible way, either relating it to the local or regional communities or extending its range of application to ‘Padania’ and, in many cases, to Italy. The political initiative can thus develop on diverse levels, engaging in the defence of the community and of national borders, and not just regional ones or those of ‘Padania’.

## 7. Conclusions

Italy was the first European country to have populist parties in government (from 1994), with an increasing role and influence on public opinion and on the whole system of parties. For many years, the differences between the populism of the League and Berlusconi’s favoured competition and fostered conflict, but in recent years convergence was sought above all else. A sort of relative complementariness was created between two types of leaderships and communication strategies. The languages, resources and rhetoric used are very different, but also effective in communicating with the ‘people’. The differences have been utilised as complementary in broadening and consolidating support, especially in northern regions.

League members in government have tried to present themselves as the spokespeople and mediators of northern interests in Rome. The League, however, has been increasingly struck by the problems that all European populist parties have had to face after entering into government coalitions. Populist formations are able to contaminate the governing coalitions into which they enter with their themes, but they lose the capacity to mobilise anti-politics and attract the vote of vast sectors of the electorate.

The accusations of corruption levelled at Rome’s political class represented the most important issue for the League’s early successes, becoming a fundamental frame of reference for the movement’s activists and voters. After the reconstruction of its alliance with Berlusconi, the League gradually reduced the role of anti-politics in its campaigns, shifting attention to other issues. The increasingly nonchalant practices of the League’s elected public administrators in managing the relation between politics and business and the instances of corruption exposed in recent years have created a great deal of embarrassment, neutralising the differences with other parties. On this terrain, a qualitative leap occurred with the judicial indictments of Bossi and his family, which called into question the very leader of the movement, who was compelled to resign as secretary.

Scandals around his private life and judicial inquests have gradually eroded Berlusconi’s personal image. The economic crisis then brought out still more serious problems. The increase of fiscal pressure dashed all hope of tax reduction. Not only Berlusconi, but also League ministers were considered responsible for failure in relation to the hopes raised.

In the 2011 administrative [municipal] elections, both the PdL and the League, still allied, suffered heavy and widespread electoral losses. Berlusconi’s last attempt at transforming the elections (in Milan) into a referendum about his person failed, and the League’s campaigns around immigration/security proved to be completely ineffective.

After the fall of the Berlusconi government, the League sought to exploit all the possibilities of opposition to Monti’s ‘technical’ government, but with much less effect than they could have had in the past, because the scandals and judicial inquests show the Carroccio to be similar to other parties. The crisis of the PdL and League became more acute because the roles of Berlusconi and Bossi as points of reference for their electorates were severely weakened. The results of the 2012 administrative elections were disastrous for the two ex-allies: The PdL and the League suffered sharp declines in their vote and lost control of many municipal administrations.

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## Nach Rechts! Demystifying the Rise of Populist and the Far-Right in Post-Transition Hungary

Adam Fabry

*Behind every fascism, there is a failed revolution.*  
(Walter Benjamin)

*Anyone who does not wish to talk about capitalism, however, should also keep quiet on the subject of fascism.'*  
(Max Horkheimer)

### **Worrying signs...**

Something is rotten in the state of Hungary. In April 2010, the conservative Fidesz-KDNP coalition, led by the mediagenic Viktor Orbán, was swept back into power in Budapest. Riding on a wave of popular discontent against the corrupt and politically bankrupt socialist-liberal government, which had governed the country since 2002, Fidesz and its junior partner won a landslide victory, obtaining a two-thirds supermajority in parliament. Once in power, Orbán promised to radically transform the Hungarian state, implementing a National System of Cooperation (*Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere*) in the name of 'national renewal'. And he has been moving quickly to fulfil his promises. The package of laws, ordinances and personal changes, which the Orbán regime got off the ground in only 18 months reads like the *minutiae* of a top-down coup d'état.

The list of the Orbán regime's misdeeds is by now very long, so I will only mention some most important. To begin with, it has placed loyal party apparatchiks in the corridors of power, including the presidency (Schmitt), the state audit office (Domokos) and the constitutional court (Stumpf, Balsai), as well as top positions in cultural organisations (the state media, the film industry and universities). Dissenting voices in the academia are persecuted and meticulously silenced. (I regret to inform you that, as part of an ongoing academic reform, the Georg Lukács Archives in Budapest, formally part of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, have ceased its scientific, editorial and publishing activity from 1 January 2012. It was shut down on the grounds that it did no longer contribute to any scientific work [sic!].) Since Orbán took power, prosecutors have been busy looking into ways in which to criminalise the parliamentary opposition. According to new regulations, the successor party of the old party-state (MSZP) can be held accountable, collectively and individually, for 'communist crimes' committed before 1989.

A new media law, passed in August 2010, ensures that little but government-controlled spin, cheap consumerist shows and provincial nationalist propaganda can be heard on Hungarian television and radio channels. The media law empowers a new, all-powerful media authority (National Media and Info-communications Authority), which is solely comprised of governing party delegates and headed by an old Fidesz hack, with the responsibility to maintain 'the undisturbed operation, in compliance with pertaining legislation in force, of the media and the markets for electronic communications, postal and information technology services', as well as maintaining fair competition and ensuring that 'service providers' comply with rules and regulations. The organisation, which is a virtual one-party authority, has the right to arbitrarily impose hefty fines on 'improper speech' and deny media outlets the renewal of their licenses (cf. *Klubrádió*). Hence, one of the paradoxes of the transformation is that in an era of unprecedented 'freedom' to travel and communication, the Hungarian public's knowledge of international relations – outside of the pre-Trianon borders of Hungary – is close to zero. Foreign correspondents are – except for rare exceptions – generally confused and hesitant about events in the wider world. The horizon has widened, but remains empty. Today, Hungary is more provincial than in the last two decades of the Kádár era. (Again, this is not a unique characteristic of Hungary, but can be witnessed throughout the ex-Soviet bloc countries.)

The right wing government in Budapest has not been resting on its laurels when it comes to restructuring the Hungarian economy. As part of its efforts to restore law and order and boost the ailing Hungarian economy, it is pursuing vicious neoconservative market fundamentalist policies (maintaining a 'balanced budget', establishing a flat tax rate system, firing civil servants *en masse*, slashing welfare benefits, introducing workfare programmes, etc.). The government has also declared a war on 'foreign capital' and introduced a number of 'unorthodox' measures in order to bring down Hungary's foreign debt and rebalance the government budget. In 2010, it introduced 'crisis taxes' on banks and financial institutions, telecommunications, energy and large retail companies (most of whom are in foreign hands) – much to the fury of neoliberal acolytes, at home and abroad. (At the time, many critics of neoliberal globalisation were enthralled by this decision. For example, the American economist Mark Weisbrot argued in *The Guardian* that under Orbán's leadership, Hungary was 'pioneering an alternative to austerity' in Europe.)

*Il sigillo di approvazione* to the new regime put into place by Orbán and his lackeys was provided on 1 January 2012, when Hungary's new constitution (*The Fundamental Law of Hungary*) came into force. The constitution, which was drawn up in less than a year and with scant regard for non-conformist opinions, stands out as a model for a new type of regressive democracy. Its most conspicuous feature is the fact that it breaks with the secular notion of the state – a central feature of liberal democracy since the French Revolution – in favour of an ethnically suffused conception of the state. Moreover, it eliminates all the guarantees of the welfare state – this gentle European version of liberal capitalism –, including: the principle of 'equal pay for equal work', the notion of social security, right to health care, by linking access to social benefits to work tests, and removing the state's obligation to provide care for its citizens. Alas, also on this point, the Orbán regime represents a change, not only in substance, but also in degree, to previous governments in Budapest. (Sure, pre-2010 governments embraced the idea of 'the minimalist state', but 'only' used administrative/fiscal measures to destroy the welfare state; they did not institutionalise it as a fundamental right.)

The government is in cahoots with the openly and viciously xenophobic and anti-Semitic Jobbik party, which is, alas the third largest party in parliament (it gained 16.67 percent of the votes in 2010 and holds 46 MPs). Although the party's style is more akin to the fascist parties in Italy and Germany in the 1930s, it expresses and practices a pressure, which drives Fidesz increasingly to the right. Under its charismatic young leader, Gábor Vóna, Jobbik has successfully managed to integrate the key points of the party's manifesto – strong state (law and order, anti-corruption, curb welfare provision to vulnerable groups in society, provide support for families), economic protectionism (revalue the role of foreign capital, support Hungarian businesses and agriculture), Magyar irredentism (the notion that the 'intellectual and spiritual' borders of the Hungarian nation encompasses the pre-Trianon borders of Hungary has literally become state ideology – with the corollary that citizens of their nation state who are ethnically, racially, denominationally, or culturally 'alien' do not really belong to the nation) – into the mainstream political agenda.

Opposition to the Orbán regime – and there have been signs, albeit weak so far, of a social movement developing from below in Hungary – is portrayed as an 'attack on Hungary' and opposed by deafening anti-communist, anti-Semitic, anti-Western, and anti-immigrant agitation. The centre-left opposition in parliament (MSZP, LMP) is weak and busy with petty-squabbling amongst its own ranks. The trade unions are down on their knees begging for consultations with the government, whilst the self-proclaimed representatives of civil society are asking for 'the establishment of a permanent "crisis council", comprised of *credible* and *proven* economic and financial experts', and 'the transfer of control over economic policy to the crisis council'.<sup>22</sup> (Both points with an exclamation mark...)

What sense can we make of this outbreak of political lunacy? How could this radical shift to the

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<sup>22</sup> 'Decemberi 7 pont', *Együttműködés a Magyar sajtószabadságért*, 3 December 2011. Available on: [http://huhu.facebook.com/sajtoszabadsagert?sk=app\\_4949752878](http://huhu.facebook.com/sajtoszabadsagert?sk=app_4949752878) (obtained 31 January 2012).

right take place in Hungary, the supposed poster boy of neoliberal transformation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)? (In the case of Orbán, the story is provided an additional touch of piquancy by virtue of the fact that he started out his political career as a young liberal dissident in the 1980s. However, since the collapse of the national right in 1994, he has turned increasingly rightwards, overseeing the transformation of Fidesz from a social-liberal to a neoconservative party.) What is the political meaning of Hungary's lurch to the right? And wherein lies the key to successful resistance against the all-out attack waged by the right wing in Hungary (and elsewhere in Europe)?

### **Dissecting the roots behind the rise of the populist and the far-right in Hungary**

Wittingly or not, mainstream commentators (both liberal and conservative) of Hungarian events tend to obfuscate the relationship between economic and political developments. Hence, when you read reports on Hungary in the increasingly bewildered and alarmed international press and the communiqués from Brussels and Washington, you are given the impression that you are tempering with a petulant population, which, narcotised by the promise of national renewal, has abandoned any sense of political reason – and *not* with political struggles, which, according to the Marxissant literature, are normally shaped by the contradictory developments of the economy.

Hence, the recent drift towards the right in Hungarian politics is conceived as an *exception* to the (liberal-capitalist) norms of governance in Europe, and not a symptom of deeper problems with in the structure as such. (Before we discuss the problems with this narrative, it might be worth to note that this line of reasoning has a long tradition with liberal circles. For example, it strikes a familiar tone with reformist explanations of the rise of fascism in inter-war Europe, which ascribed the popularity of Mussolini's black shirts to a 'post-war psychosis', or a '*Crash* psychosis' in the case of Hitler's rise to power in Weimar Germany).

The shortcomings of mainstream accounts of the seemingly incessant drive to the right in Hungarian politics were illustrated during the fiery *guerre de mots*, which recently took place between Brussels (and to a lesser extent Washington) and Budapest, in the wake of the European Commission's (EC) decision to launch legal proceedings against Hungary for violating EU treaties. What did mainstream commentators have to say?

The liberal press, in Hungary and abroad, accused Orbán *in personam* for threatening Hungary's political and economic stability. Philip Stephens, the normally imperturbable political commentator of the *Financial Times*, described Orbán as a 'dissident turned petty tyrant', and said that his version of democracy was bearing frightening similarities to Putin's Russia.

'As in Russia, Hungarians can still vote; citizens can protest and privately owned media can criticise Mr Orban. But this is faux democracy. State institutions, the courts and the national broadcaster are firmly in Fidesz hands.'<sup>23</sup>

The left-liberal German daily, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, went even further, accusing Orbán of being 'infected with a Bonaparte virus', and 'misusing his two-thirds majority in parliament to subordinate the state to himself and to his party.' In the heart of Europe, its correspondent wrote, 'a managed democracy with authoritarian traits is emerging.'<sup>24</sup>

However, it was not only the liberal press that attacked the Orbán regime. The right wing government in Budapest also had to withstand criticism from the conservative establishment in the West. On the one hand, this because more moderate conservatives still insists on the need to adhere to the rule of law. On the other hand, they have been less than convinced by the Orbán's attempt to save the more affluent Hungarian middle classes from the burdens of austerity and the consequences of the

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<sup>23</sup> Stephens, P., 'A Hungarian Coup Worthy of Putin', *Financial Times*, 5 January 2012.

<sup>24</sup> 'Was Europa gegen Orbáns Bonaparte-Virus tun muss', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18 January 2012.

new flat tax system, both implemented upon by himself, through ‘unorthodox’ economic policies (‘crisis taxes’ on banks, telecommunications and large retail companies, nationalisation of private pension funds, etc.). (The effectiveness of these measures has been dubious, but at least he tried...) These moves hurt the interests of large multinational corporations, which conservatives across world so carefully nurture.

What was to be done to stop the increasingly authoritarian Orbán? Liberal and conservative critics of the Orbán regime were joining each other in concert, demanding Cameron, Merkel, Sarkozy and other ‘responsible’ statesmen to reel in Orbán before his authoritarian virus becomes contagious.

As for the seemingly growing popularity of Jobbik, mainstream commentators seem to hold on to the gullible belief, which holds that now that it has become a parliamentary force it will simply be sucked into mainstream politics.

But history shows that when fascists grow, they feel more confident to implement and act on their beliefs.

Problems?!

1. Hypocritical. (Asking the very same people that are dismantling democratic institutions in Greece and Italy, in favour of neoliberal/technocratic rule, to ‘save’ democracy in Hungary!)
2. Imperialist.
3. Anti-plebeian. (Ordinary Hungarians cannot get rid of Orbán themselves, thus need ‘help’ from abroad.)
4. Does not say one word about the anti-egalitarian policies of the Orbán regime...

So, where are we then to look in order to move beyond this impasse?

The old Marxist notion of ‘totality’ still seems pertinent today. The rise of populist and far right politics and ideology *cannot* be isolated to one single factor, but needs to be understood *in relation* to wider economic, political, and social developments. As the Marxist philosopher Max Horkheimer once wrote, ‘Anyone who does not wish to talk about capitalism, however, should also keep quiet on the subject of fascism.’

The answer to the rise of new, more aggressive right wing political forces in Hungary must be sought in the confusion that have followed in the wake of ‘the democratic turn’ in 1989. What was the supposed meaning of 1989? As the radical Hungarian philosopher G.M. Tamás cogently pointed out a couple of years ago, mainstream commentators saw the demise of ‘actually existing socialism’ in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in 1989 as ‘a reestablishment of “normalcy”, a historical continuity and a restoration of the triple shibboleth: parliamentary democracy, “the market”, and an unconditional allegiance to “the West”.’<sup>25</sup> The zeitgeist of the period that was to follow was summed up by Francis Fukuyama’s famous ‘end of history’ thesis, which stated that the downfall of ‘actually existing socialism’ represented an ‘unabashed victory for economic and political liberalism’, marking not only the ‘triumph of the West’, but also ‘the end of history as such’.

1989 was the *annus mirabilis* when the wonderland of free market capitalism and liberal democracy was opened for the ex-Soviet satellite states in Central and Eastern Europe. The new political elite in the region (which often bore a remarkable similarity with the old one) embraced neoliberal reforms (deregulation, privatisation, marketisation), in the hope that these were to spur economic growth, higher living standards, etc. The hopes of ordinary Hungarians were well summarised by Miklós

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<sup>25</sup> Tamás, 2007, ‘Counter-revolution against a counter-revolution’ (available on: <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-09-18-tamas-en.html>).

Vásárhelyi, the former press secretary of the reform-minded Stalinist leader of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. In 1989 he told a *New York Times* reporter:

‘First of all there will really be a Europe again. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe will finally get an opportunity to unite with the West. We will begin to live under the same conditions. It will take time, but socially, politically and economically we will achieve what the Western countries have already achieved. The door is now *open*.’<sup>26</sup>

With hindsight, we now that this turned out to be a mirage. The neoliberal experiment in Central and Eastern Europe turned out to be a complete failure. Some developments:

- Neoliberal reforms have, by and large, failed to ‘jump start’ the transformation economies. Throughout the region, neoliberal restructuring led to a ‘post-transition recession’ whose magnitude and duration even the World Bank was forced to admit was ‘comparable to that of developed countries during the Great Depression, and for much of them it was much worse.’<sup>27</sup>

- Restructuring also came at a high social cost. The ‘structural adjustment’ between 1988 and 1995, according to Hungary’s Central Bureau of Statistics, destroyed more economic assets than the World War II, one-and-a-half million jobs vanished overnight, and real wages and pension fell by one-third. The effects were particularly bad for the Roma population. Between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s, the employment rate of the Roma dropped by more than half, from 75 to 30 percent.<sup>28</sup> By the early 2000s, the incidence of poverty was seven times as high for a household with a Roma head of family compared to others.<sup>29</sup>

- Economic recession also resulted in rising income inequalities. The income of the richest ten per cent of the population towards the final days of the Kádár regime was around 4-5 times that of the poorest decile. By 2003 the figure had risen to 8.4.<sup>30</sup> In concrete terms, this translates into staggering differences in wealth: while the poorest one million Hungarians control a mere 3 per cent, the richest one million own 25-26 per cent of national wealth.<sup>31</sup> And I am speaking here of Hungary, the ‘success story’ of the region. Russia, the most important case, remained a black hole...

- Ordinary people are disillusioned with parliamentary democracy; indeed they increasingly hate it (together with its representatives at home and abroad).

However, while neoliberalism failed to stimulate economic growth (not just in the former Soviet bloc, but also worldwide<sup>32</sup>), it nonetheless turned out to be a great deal for capitalists, but a nightmare for workers worldwide. Economic globalisation has enabled capitalists to increase what Marx called the amount of *relative surplus value*. The same amount of value can be produced in much less time, leading to increasing productivity along with an intensification of work. As a result, profit rates have rebounded somewhat from the 1980s and onwards (though they have not returned to the levels experienced during the Long Boom). However, as the Marxist economists Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy have shown, the benefits have been distributed highly unevenly in society. In the US, the share of national income of the top 1 percent of income earners soared from the late 1970s, to reach 15 percent by the end of the century. The ratio of the median compensation of workers to the salaries of CEOs increased from around 30:1 in 1970 to nearly 500:1 by 2000. In Britain, the top 1 percent of income earners doubled their share of the national income from 6.5 percent to 13 percent since 1982. Elsewhere in the world, we can see similar concentrations of wealth and power emerging

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<sup>26</sup> Vásárhelyi, here quoted in Gwertzman and Kaufman, 1990, pp. 225-226 (my emphasis).

<sup>27</sup> World Bank, 2002, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> UNDP, 2003, p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> TÁRKI, 2004, p. 103.

<sup>30</sup> TÁRKI, p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> Romsics, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Global per capita growth rates fell from 3.5 per cent in the 1960s to 2.4 per cent during the troubled decade of the 1970s. Data for subsequent decades have been even more depressing, with global growth rates of 1.4 per cent and 1.1 per cent for the 1980s and 1990s. For the 2000s, the picture was even bleaker with annual aggregate growth struggling to reach 1 per cent prior to the outbreak of the recent financial and economic crisis. World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, 2004, *A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All*, Geneva: International Labour Office.

(eg. oligarchs in Russia, ‘nouveaux riches’ in China, etc.).<sup>33</sup> However, the ability of the much-revered ‘knowledge economy’ to create and absorb value is already showing signs of being limited. As a result of economic restructuring, unemployment becomes an increasingly *structural* problem – independent of changes in the production cycle (eg. the integration of precarious workers, part-time workers, underemployed, the so-called ‘compulsory entrepreneurs’ [*kényszervállalkozók*], and the black economy into what used to be known before as ‘work’). Faced with structural unemployment, falling real wages, and aging population, the state is coming under increasing pressures on consumption and the ability to finance the provision of welfare. (In fact, this can only be maintained through ‘financialisation’. However, as the current financial and economic crisis is showing, this leads to economic crises and potential political convulsions.) Hence, governments are abandoning the provision of welfare services in principle and practice.

This were the new, increasingly aggressive right wing enters the political arena. In Hungary, Orbán and his supporters further to the right on the political spectrum present themselves as a political force that seeks to embody the energies of the disgruntled *vox populi*. Fidesz and Jobbik are calling for a *moral revolution*. Conservatives in appearance (order, work, family, hierarchy, etc.), in reality they seek to delegitimize the notion of social (public) responsibility for those who are excluded from the sphere of subjugated work (which was still within reach of the ‘old’ European Christian-democracy). *Who is not worthy of our assistance?* This is the revolutionary (eg. counterrevolutionary) cry of *la nuova destra*, which rings out over the Hungarian plains.<sup>34</sup>

In Hungary and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, the main targets are, in line with vulgar reactionary tradition, the Roma, the Jews, or those who are unable to work, the sick and the old. Further to the West, the main target is Islam. Leaders of far right parties portray themselves as people who are willing to express a sentiment they claim no one else dares to express: that Muslims are undermining Europe and that the West must be saved. Jimmie Åkesson, the 32-year-old chairman of the Sweden Democrats, argues that Islam represents the ‘biggest foreign threat [to Sweden] since World War II’.<sup>35</sup> Geert Wilders claims that ‘Islam is not a religion, it’s an ideology ... of a retarded culture’.<sup>36</sup> He has campaigned for banning the *Quran* in the Netherlands, comparing it with Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. He advocates stopping immigration from Muslim countries, supports banning the construction of new mosques, and has recently proposed the institution of a headscarf tax in the Netherlands.<sup>37</sup> *Ergo*: the neoconservative and far right parties are the true defenders of European values (whatever that means) in a Huntingtonian clash between Judeo-Christianity and Islam.

Even though immigration to Europe has been declining for years, some opinion polls seem to show that there is a potential audience for these claims. The right wing press has willingly played its role in breeding far right sentiments.<sup>38</sup> As a result, over half of Danes believe that Islam hinders social harmony; three-quarters of citizens from the former East Germany want to ‘seriously limit’ the practice of Islam; half of Britons associate Islam with terrorism; four in ten French people see Muslims living in their country as a ‘threat’ to their national identity; more than half of Austrians believe that ‘Islam poses a threat to the West and our familiar lifestyle’.<sup>39</sup> In Hungary, where the

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<sup>33</sup> Duménil and Lévy, 2004, *Capital Resurgent: Roots of the Neoliberal Revolution*, Harvard University Press.

<sup>34</sup> Tamás, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in ‘Continent of Fear: The Rise of Europe’s Right-Wing Populists’, *Der Spiegel*, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in interview with *The Observer*, 17 February 2008.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Surge for Dutch anti-Islam Freedom Party’, *BBC News*, 10 June 2010; ‘Dutch voters boost far-right party of Geert Wilders’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 10 June 2010; *Der Spiegel*, 2010.

<sup>38</sup> As Liz Fekete, Chair of Britain’s Institute of Race Relations argues, ‘[t]he media have uncritically incorporated the idea that “Islam equals threat”, therefore Muslims are a threat’. The media are ‘constantly looking for the extreme voice within the Muslim community, because it’s an easy peg to hang a story on. So if a small extremist sect that doesn’t have any legitimacy within the Muslim community is organizing a protest, it becomes the major framework for any public discussion on Muslims.’ Quoted in Biswas, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Biswas, K., 2011, ‘Eyes to the far right’, *New Internationalist*, Issue 443, 1 June 2011.

immigrant population is virtually zero – they constitute less than 2 percent of the Hungarian population –, recent opinion polls show that respondents believe that minorities and immigrants constitute almost half of the Hungarian population. More frightening still, 59 percent of the respondents supported the idea of creating criminal records, in which the racial origins of perpetrators would be identified.<sup>40</sup>

These ideas were pioneered by neoconservatives like Thatcher and Reagan (Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis in the academia), but we should not fool ourselves to believe that these ideas are reserved to the political right. In the last two decades social democracy has proven to be more than able to play to the same tunes (cf. New Labour's witch-hunt for 'benefit cheats', which was recently reiterated by Ed Miliband). However, the neoconservative and far right has broken with neoconservatism/neoliberalism, in as much that its representatives are not in favour of ending the provision of benefits to everybody – it should still be maintained for 'families' and 'small businesses' (eg. white; Christian; preferably heterosexual, middleclass men and women). Apart from some minor stylistic differences, this more or less sums up the political parties of the contemporary far right (although, with the exception of hard core fascists like Anders Breivik and his ideological acolytes in *Jobbik* and *Attaka*, few are yet willing to kill for it).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to point out that rather than an exception; Hungary is a 'symptomal state' of the failure of liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism.

The rise of neoconservative and fascistoid far right parties represents a *reaction* against the failure of liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism. In this sense, Hungary is not an exception, but rather a 'symptomal state' of the present political trajectory in Europe. Indeed, whilst Hungary might very well be the most reactionary state in Europe at the present, the picture is hardly rosier elsewhere. Similar trends can be observed throughout the continent (not only in France and Italy, but also in former strongholds of social democracy, such as the Netherlands, Sweden, and Norway).

What sets Hungary apart from the other countries on the continent, however, is that the reaction is much more 'conscientious' and 'organic' than elsewhere. The new (hegemonic, *not* totalitarian) party-state that is being established in Hungary by the Orbán regime is not just implementing changes on the 'macro' level, but also in the 'meso' and 'micro' level of society. Fidesz does not only control two-thirds of parliament and a whopping 93 percent (!) of local governments. The changes in Hungarian society go deeper than that... For example:

- Changing of street names (Moszkva tér → Széll Kálmán tér), statues (in with Reagan, away with Károlyi, Attila József, and so on), and theatres (*Új Színház*), etc.
- Culture and education (silencing of dissenting voices, new theatres, and the reform of the national curriculum).
- New constitution (elimination of universal welfare, etc.).

However, the Hungarian public is unlikely to get a nuanced view about these events. Au contraire... According to recent opinion polls, 73 percent (that is nearly three-quarters) of Hungarians intending to vote support one of the two right wing parties (with Jobbik seriously challenging the socialists for second place in parliament). The new media law, Western diplomacy's rough and clumsy response to the Orbán regime, and decades of increasingly alienating provincialism all contribute to this.

In the light of this dire picture, opposition to the regime and the far right seems more difficult than ever. I am personally a supporter of international solidarity (in my case this solidarity lies first and

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<sup>40</sup> 'Keményebb bánásmódot sürgetnek a bevándorlókka', *Népszabadság*, 13 February 2012.

foremost with the striking and demonstrating workers in Greece), but empty phrases about ‘the need to build a united front’, and so on, count for precious little to those that are first to feel the advancement of forces of reaction on their own skin (the Roma in the case of Hungary, Romania, Czech Republic, and Slovakia).

## **The Panorama of the European Extreme Right: Populisms and Extreme Rights, East and West**

Saverio Ferrari

In Europe, populism, nationalism, right-wing extremism and neo-Nazism, in so far as they continue to be specific and distinct phenomena, increasingly tend to overlap and mix.

In a long and comprehensive study exploring the extreme right a few years ago, Pierre Milza (Institut d'Études Politiques, Paris) maintained that 'the main danger threatening our liberal democracies' is now represented by the national-populist rights. 'Many of them', he clarified, referring in particular to their leaders, 'come from post-World War Two neo-fascist and neo-nationalist movements' and aim 'to plant in the populations ideas current more than a century ago', from 'criminalising the immigrant to taking refuge in identity articulated ethnically or culturally'. It is a political phenomenon, he concluded, 'which in its breadth far surpasses the occasional breakthroughs of the ultra-right after the failure of the Hitler coalition'.<sup>41</sup>

In recent years the panorama has worsened, with one central feature: The wave has grown and crossed from East to West.

### **Within and on the borders of the European Union**

The last European elections, in June 2009, provided a snapshot of the strong growth of the populist and radical right.

In England, the openly fascist British National Party achieved 6.2 %, electing (two) MPs for the first time in its history; in Holland, former Liberal Party member Geert Wilders' ferociously anti-Islam formation, the Party for Freedom (PVV), got 17 % of the vote; in Austria the two anti-immigrant groups, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ), have in total gotten more than 17 %. In Belgium Vlaams Belang ('Flemish Interest') got 10.9 % of the vote; in Denmark the Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People's Party) 14.8 %, in Greece the racists of LAOS (the acronym of the Orthodox Popular Rally) 7.2 %, while in France Le Pen's Front National got 6.3 %, then to spurt to 10 % in the 2010 regional elections. In Sweden, Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats) went from 3.3 % in the European elections to 5.7 % in the September 2010 political elections.

Outside the borders of the European Union, in Switzerland's 2007 legislative elections the old agrarian party, the Democratic Union of the Centre (DUC), garnered 28.9 %, dipping by only a few points in 2011 (25.9 %). This was analogous to the success achieved in the extreme north of the continent in Norway by the Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet), which grew in the September 2009 elections by more than 7 points, reaching 22.1 % of votes.

The situation is no better if we look at the east. Hungary's Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary) – ultra-nationalist, anti-Rom and anti-Semitic – first conquered 14.8 % in the elections for the European Parliament, then 16.7 % in the political elections, behind the conservatives of FIDESZ (Federation of Young Democrats—Hungarian Civic Union), who succeeded in getting Viktor Orbán elected with 52 % as head of government. In Romania the Greater Romania Party ('Romania Mare' – which hates the Transylvanian Hungarians and would like to swallow up Moldavia) reached 8.6 %; in Bulgaria Ataka ('Attack Political Party', formerly 'National Union Attack'), hostile to the Turkish minority and against entrance into NATO and the EU, 11.96 %; in Slovakia the National Party ('Slovenská národná strana', or SNS), which holds the Hungarians responsible for a domination that lasted 150 years, 5.56 %.

In an investigation which appeared in the January 2011 *Le Monde Diplomatique*, historian and journalist Dominique Vidal pointed out that from 2009, including the following European elections, right-wing populist and racist formations reached more than 10 % of votes in a good 11 countries;

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<sup>41</sup>Pierre Milza, *L'Europe en chemise noire. Les extrêmes droites de 1945 à aujourd'hui*, Paris : Fayard, 'Nouvelles études contemporaines', 2002.

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, the Netherlands and Switzerland.<sup>42</sup>

### **The external enemy**

The situation from country to country is often very different as is the effect of the economic crisis on national realities. What is similar, on the other hand, is the decision by the parties or movements cited here to inveigh against an external enemy, identified in turn with Roma, with gays, Jews, Moslems or foreigners in general – an ‘invasion’ against which to rediscover and reintroduce presumed patriotic values through an intensified nationalism or vain separatist ambitions. It is a single phenomenon with very many facets.

The intensification of these tendencies – already present in embryo for decades in the form of small or irrelevant political formations – has accompanied processes of globalisation. The appearance in Europe of the first parties of the populist right dates from the 1970s: Le Pen’s Front national in France (1972), the Progress Party in Norway (1973) or Vlaams Blok in Belgium (1978).

Their progress, first slow and then accelerated, occurred in a framework which was rapidly transformed, marked by new economic and financial relations as well as by profound technological changes, with the introduction of general instability, insecurity and fear. Broad sectors found themselves defenceless in the face of the new social and economic reality.

Some epochal changes, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, the immigration from Africa, Asia and eastern Europe, 11 September 2001 and the ecological catastrophes, have enabled the crossing and connecting of nationalist and racist feelings, within a European political framework marked by the crisis of traditional parties and a remarkable electoral mobility significantly benefitting those who in the face of chaos promised solutions such as the closing of the frontiers and territorial reappropriation. In many countries an additional binding element was anger over the loss of importance or size.

In sum, these populisms were many and varied but they always arose in opposition to the existing governments and authorities.

### **The rightward shift of the conservative parties**

In this context, starting with the mid-1980s, there was also a progressive shift to the right on the part of parties belonging to the European People’s Party (EPP), a transnational formation created in 1976 by the Christian Democratic Group in the European Parliament. Its original Christian Democratic composition was called into question, first with the entrance in 1983 of the ultra-conservative Greek party New Democracy, and some years later, in April 1991, with the formal opening of the EPP to the conservative parties of Britain and Denmark (respectively, the Conservative Party and Danish Folkeparti). There followed from 1992 to 1993, the entrance of the Swedish conservatives of the Moderate Party (Moderate Samlingspartiet) and the Finns of the National Coalition Party (Kansallinen Lokoomus). Thus by 1993 the EPP’s process of transformation was underway.

In 1994 the Italian party which had won the political elections that year, that is, Forza Italia, was supposed to enter the EPP. After an initial refusal by the EPP due to political and electoral accords with Alleanza Nazionale, given the neofascist past of this party, its deputies were accepted in June 1998 within the EPP. The official acceptance into the EPP was definitively confirmed in December 1999, despite the opposition of the Italian People’s Party (Partito Popolare Italiano) and other Christian Democratic formations (Belgian, Dutch, Irish, Greek, Catalan, Basque and from Luxemburg) constituted in a grouping inside the EPP called ‘Athens Group’.

Thanks, finally, to the birth of the People of Freedom (‘Popolo della Libertà’, or PdL) – which was immediately admitted to EPP – resulting from the fusion of Forza Italia and the Alleanza Nazionale, some older figures from the history of Italian neofascism, who once belonged to the Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano, or MSI), also entered and became part of the European Popular family.

The EPP, the largest party represented in each of the institutions of the European Union

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<sup>42</sup>Dominique Vidal, ‘Le estreme destre alla riscossa’, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Italian edition, January 2011.

(Commission, Council and Parliament), at the end of this development now appears with a profile strongly tilted to the right, as seen by the presence in it of Hungary's FIDESZ, led by Premier Viktor Orbán who in 2009 was named Vice-President of the EPP itself.

Three models: The Front National, the Northern League and the Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid, or PVV) today represent three different facets of the variegated universe of Europe's populist and radical right.

The Front National, one of the largest and most long-lived on the continent, was formed in 1972 taking the Italian Social Movement as its model, directly honouring the latter by using the same symbol (the three-coloured flame replacing the Italian colours with those of the French flag. Its founding nucleus, consisting of the pro-Nazi group *Ordre Nouveau*, was at first identified with its first leading group. It was no coincidence that a full four of the five-member Secretariat came from the collaborationist Vichy regime.

The gathering place for the most extreme spirits of the French right, from traditionalists to Catholic fundamentalists, from nostalgic people to anti-Semites, the FN was always characterised by its acute nationalism. Exploiting the discontent generated by the deep transformations in French society it built its electoral fortunes blaming immigration for all evils, from the increase of unemployment and the precarity of labour to the rise of criminality. Its slogan was 'French first' for access to jobs and services, which was accompanied on the international level by a rejection of the European Union.

Its highest vote was achieved in the 2002 presidential elections, with 17.79 %. On this occasion, its president Jean-Marie Le Pen, surpassing the Socialist candidate, got as far as the run-off ballot against Chirac.

The FN's tone, with the passing of its leadership from Jean-Marie Le Pen to his daughter Marine, has become more moderate, still keeping its rather clear positions on France's exit from NATO and the Euro. The strategy – in part in view of the April [2012] elections – now seems directed towards winning greater acceptance among the young (among whom it had already been the most voted party in 2002) and among employees and workers in the urban peripheries. The FN's initiative is focused above all on the urban zones and the megalopolises, once the terrain of the left, among the middle classes and the proletariat, attacking the politicians, globalisation and immigrants who are accused of grabbing up jobs and being responsible for insecurity and urban blight.

The case of the League in Italy is different. It is the oldest party of the so-called Second Republic, having an over 26-year history dating from its first beginnings, when it was called the Lombard League. It is one of the groups that were founded *ex novo*, without coming out of previous histories.

There are two crucial transitional moments in its evolution. The first, at the end of the 1980s, with the decision to stress socio-economic rather than the initial ethnocentric federalism, according less importance to dialects as tending to lead to political divisions rather than power. From this outlook the Northern League arose in 1991 as a federation of several groups (from the *Lega Lombarda* to the *Liga Veneta*, from *Piemont Autonomista* to the *Unione Ligure* and other movements). With various twists and turns, this was also the basis of the development between improbable northern parliamentary representatives and secessionist impulses (as in 1996), still however within the horizon of a separatist project.

The second transition occurred in March 2002, at the fourth congress in Assago, when the League turned decisively in the direction of a new identity, lining up behind the defence of the 'Padano [Po River Valley] race' and in the name of 'opposition to a multi-racial society', against 'the non-European invasion', identified as the cause of the 'corruption of customs and traditions', as well as a vehicle of 'criminality' and 'disease'.

In his concluding speech, Umberto Bossi openly spoke of immigration as 'an invasion that has been programmed in order to unhinge society', comparing it to a 'horde' that can 'submerge the decaying West'. New points of reference were adopted, among them Alain de Benoist's theories of 'ethnic differentialism', and, along with a certain crude anti-clericalism, it indulged in neo-pagan native rituals.

In this phase it took on the features (the analyses, contents and language) typical of the radical right, ending also by sharing with it a conspiratorial vision of history always understood as the result of dark manoeuvres and intrigues. It attacked the Enlightenment, the *Risorgimento* (for which it blamed the

Masonic lodges) and the French Revolution for having established formal rights of equality – all of this without the burden of the fascist past, although there were some symbolic reminiscences.

In succeeding years, from June 2002 to December 2003, the League developed intensive relations with the extreme right, in particular with Forza Nuova. There were numerous initiatives, with common conferences and rallies. It was no surprise when, on 2 April 2004, the EU Observatory on Racism and Xenophobia, an organism established in 1997 in the framework of the European Parliament, categorised the League as belonging in the same ideological group as that of extreme right forces.

What has to be understood about the League is its rightward, xenophobic and racist direction centred on a mythic 'Padania'. It is a total invention, without any real national basis, a geographic concept that is stretched or shrunk according to the League's electoral successes. It is a myth in which Party and Nation tend to coincide.

Thus the boundaries of a community were established, which was supposed to be motivated by common interests, irrespective of any social and class division, in struggle against centralist oppression. In the same context, there was the exaltation of the presumed virtues of its indigenous population, in particular industriousness and honesty, often symbolised by small-scale producers.

This mythic construction then gave rise to concrete acts, in a spiral aimed at protecting the 'Padani' from every sort of racial and social contamination, that is, the policy of expelling immigrants, even those from other EU countries; fingerprinting Roma children; preventing boats from landing; the systematic persecution of poor people (the proposals of repatriation for those with low income and without adequate dwellings; but also odious measures against mendicancy). In the League's administrative zones, the goal was and is the establishment of a true apartheid regime: from the obligation for non-residents to show a penal certificate, to the study grants and baby bonuses only for Italian citizens, to the general exclusion of foreigners from social contributions. It is a sort of differential welfare.

In the Netherlands the experience of the PVV led by Geert Wilders is different. He has given birth to a populist and nationalist right that focuses its main efforts against Islam and the incapacity Wilders claims Moslems have to integrate themselves. However, unlike the parties surveyed above, the PVV has progressive accents on the social level. Wilders openly claims the heritage of Pim Fortuyn, who leapt into the front pages in 2001 as a xenophobic and Islamophobic leader, a self-confessed gay, assassinated in May 2002 on the eve of the political elections, who in his own programme advocated euthanasia, gay marriages and the liberalisation of drugs. Honoured by the media for having made an anti-Koran film in 2008, Wilders also ended by being indicted for incitement to racial hatred. Many aspects of this situation are not comparable to most other movements of Europe's extreme right.

### **Nationalists, ethno-regionalists and Islamophobes**

If nationalism is a distinctive feature of a good part of the extreme-right formations from West to East – for example the Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Russian or ex-Yugoslav groups, all intent on realising a 'great state' without the internal presence of ethnic minorities (nor – why not – of Jews) – then the League model, which we can include in the ethno-regionalist family, is different. The Belgians of Vlaams Belang and the Swiss of the Democratic Union of the Centre must certainly be included within this family.

Vlaams Belang was founded in 2004 as the direct continuation of Vlaams Blok, which was constituted in 1978, after which it dissolved itself due to its conviction by Belgium's Court of Appeal for racism and xenophobia. Its slogan is 'Belgie barst' ('Belgium is cracking'). In 2007 Vlaams Belang got 21 % of votes in Flanders (amounting to 12 % nationally), becoming the leading Flemish workers' party. In its programme, decidedly regionalist and critical of the European Union, the main goal is the independence of Flanders.

By contrast, the DUC, founded in Switzerland in 1971, has, under the leadership of Christoph Blocher, adopted increasingly radical positions starting at the end of the 1970s, placing itself on an openly xenophobic slope, targeting immigrants and refugees.

Today the DUC is Switzerland's leading party, with 25.9 % of votes achieved in 2011 in the election for the National Council (the lower house of parliament). In 2006, after succeeding through a

referendum (with the participation of almost 70 % of the electorate) in getting two new laws passed, which sharply restricted the rights of asylum and immigration, and in 2009 with the prohibition on the construction of new minarets (with 58 % support), the DUC continues to align itself against Switzerland's entrance into the United Nations and against joining the European Union.

On the other hand, similar in many ways to the Dutch PVV experience, we have to consider the galaxy of northern European parties, which do not stress attacking individual rights but rather a policy of managing welfare, prioritising the protection of the indigenous population. In Denmark, this family of European populism is doubtless represented by the Danish People's Party (which got 12.3 % in the 2011 political elections), in Norway by the Progress Party, which emerged as an anti-tax protest movement, in Sweden by the Sweden Democrats (whose roots, however, are in neofascism despite the moderate turn occurring at the end of the 1990s) and in Finland by the True Finns (at 19 % in 2011). Common to all these formations is the rejection of a multicultural society, an intense Islamophobia and sharp hatred for immigrants, the defence of national identity and opposition to the EU. It is a populism which we could define as one more of 'prosperity' than of crisis.

### **The Hungarian drift**

For Hungary we can safely speak today of a dangerous authoritarian drift, if not of an incipient process of fascist transformation.

Since April 2010, when the national-conservative premier Viktor Orbán and his FIDESZ party came to govern the country, there has been a progressive escalation, which first included a new constitution erasing every reference to the republic, substituting explicit religious claims, following which anti-liberty laws were approved with the intent of subordinating the judiciary, artistic production, university teaching and the press to the control of the government (with the attendant purging of employees of the state radio and television and the closing of the oppositions broadcast media). In the very Constitution, the communist parties and their successors have been labelled 'criminal organisations'. It was established, also by law, that the embryo is a human being from the start of pregnancy, and furthermore that marriages can only take place between a man and a woman.

'Obligatory useful work' (közmunka) was also introduced for the unemployed, the great majority of whom belong to the Roma ethnicity, compelled in order not to lose their miniscule poverty subsidies to perform manual labour for the state, eight hours a day, wearing identification t-shirts. It is a project which could end by involving up to 300,000 people in all of Hungary.

We should note in this context the sharp growth, including electoral growth (16.7 % in the last political elections) of Jobbik, which came out of pre-existing radical circles and became a party in 2003, and which gave birth to genuine paramilitary groups (such as the Hungarian Guard, or Magyar Gárda), organising intimidation marches as well as diverse pogrom episodes against the Roma. With an anti-Semitic stamp, as is all of the Hungarian right from the Justice and Life Party founded in 1993 (which got 5.5 % of votes in the 1998 political elections, entering into the government coalition), to the Hungarist Movement, whose leader, Albert Szabó, called the holocaust a 'Jewish bluff', Jobbik, formally in the opposition, claims to be fighting against the 'Masonic and Zionist conspiracies', drawing inspiration from the Arrow Cross Party, that is, from the militias of Ferenc Szálasi, who rose to power in 1944 under the aegis of the Nazi occupiers.

Emblematic of the Hungarian situation was the funeral last September of Sándor Képíró, the ex-official of the Csendőrség (the Gendarmerie at the time of the Horthy dictatorship), accused by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre of the Novi Sad massacres in the then Yugoslavia under Axis occupation, and of the murder of at least 1,200 Jews and Partisan suspects. 500 people gave him the last salute, among them veratans of the Gendarmerie, young people with the black uniform of the Magyar Gárda, but also some parliamentary deputies, all with great honours in a public form.

### **The Ex-Soviet bloc**

In the East, the turn occurred in the 1990s, following the fall of the Berlin Wall.

What has to be emphasised in this geographic area is that the radical and populist right draws some of its peculiar characteristics from the pre-Soviet past. In the womb of recent nationalisms there were

reactions smouldering for decades against Russian imperialism and against preceding dominations (Tatar and Islamic), as we have seen in Poland, Slovakia and Romania.

The Russian case is distinct. There the recovery of an often mythic past refers not only to the distant epoch of Peter the Great but also to the Stalinist period, esteemed in terms of imperial and military greatness.<sup>43</sup>

One thinks of the identity of Russia's principal populist party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR), founded in 1990 by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, characterised, despite its name, by its ultra-nationalist and racist profile. Although it has several times praised Adolf Hitler, the LDPR hopes for a return to the USSR, with the reannexation of the Soviet republics and the abolition of the federal system. In the 2003 political elections the LDPR garnered 11.7 %, with 7 million votes and 37 seats. In 2007 it confirmed its presence in the Duma, reaching 40 seats and becoming the only right-wing formation with a parliamentary presence. In the recent elections of December 2011, it still got electoral support, with 11.68 %, increasing its representation by 16 seats.

Among Zhirinovskiy's allies are the National Bolshevik Party, founded in 1993 by the writer Eduard Limonov, whose banner, in what is for us Westerners an incomprehensible mix, is a hammer and sickle in a white circle against a red background. It is an ambiguous and confused organisation, located somewhere between mysticism, fascism and nostalgia for the Soviet Union. It was no coincidence that some sections of European neofascism tried to interface with this tendency in the early 1990s. On the same wave length was the Bolshevik National Front and the so-called Eurasia Party, an advocate of a strategic alliance between Russians, Europeans and Middle-Eastern states (above all Iran) with an anti-American accent, formed in 2002 on the initiative of Aleksandr Dugin, the translator in Russia of the works of the leading Italian neo-Nazi theoretician Julius Evola.

### **Neofascists and neo-Nazis**

The framework of the openly neofascist organisations in Europe is now fragmented into a myriad of groups and associations. It is a long list that is almost impossible to give in detail here, with a political life marked by a high degree of contentiousness, rapid disappearances and continuous decomposition.

It is striking that this milieu's potential political and electoral space has been occupied, in almost all European countries, by the greater power of attraction of the populist right formations, including those which, among their many ambiguities, were initially founded as groupings that were nostalgic for the past but which then attenuated this connection. We think of the Front National in France, Haider's party in Austria or the Sweden Democrats. Exceptions, which have been able to achieve their own autonomous electoral places, are the British National Party, Germany's NPD (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, which entered some regional parliaments after German reunification) and Hungary's Jobbik, the latter having become a sort of model to follow in its mix of populist radicalism and Nazi/fascist ideology, but recently, above all, Golden Dawn in Greece (whose symbol is the meander of Rhodes, on which the Nazis based their swastika), which, with previous extreme-right formations in Greece like LAOS emptying out, achieved a little less than 7 % in the May-June 2012 political elections. With its fascist-style action squads against immigrants, it is becoming a sort of model that is being followed.

The attempts over the years to unite or coordinate this sector all quickly failed. Le Pen tried it in 1998 with Euronat, which, it was hoped, would be the point of reference for those who wanted to fight for a 'Europe of nations'. However, by the following year the project had foundered miserably after the initial acceptance of Forza Nuova, the Slovak Nationalist Party, Belgium's Vlaams Blok, the Hellenic Front and Spain's Democracia Nacional. The experiment was tried again in 2005, again by Le Pen. On this occasion, Fiamma Tricolore, the Dutch New Right, the British National Party and a small Swedish group joined – again with Democracia Nacional.

With entrance into the EU of Bulgaria and Romania, with the respective parliamentary deputies of Ataka and Romania Mare, in January 2007 Euronat succeeded in launching an autonomous

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<sup>43</sup>Giuseppe Scaliati, *La destra radical in Europa. Tra svolte ideologiche e nuovi sviluppi*, Acireale – Roma: Bonanno Editore, 2008.

parliamentary group in Strasbourg called Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty (ITS). In this instance too the attempt ran aground, as early as November of the same year, due to the declarations of Alessandra Mussolini (elected with Alternativa Sociale), which were offensive to the Romanian people, following the homicide in Rome of an Italian woman by a Roma person with Romanian passport. The five deputies of Romania Mare left ITS, depriving the group of the numbers required to continue with group status.

The European National Front had no better fortune. It was constituted in 2002 on the initiative of Blas Pinar and the Spanish Falange. Beyond the Falange, the group was joined by Forza Nuova, the NPD, Romania's Noua Dreaptă and Greece's Patriotic Alliance. Some years later it practically ceased to exist.

We should also mention the by now decades-old phenomenon of nazi-skin bands, not necessarily linked to parties or political organisations but perpetrators, East and West, of a long chain of aggressive acts and homicides aimed at immigrants, gays, Roma and left political activists, with high peaks of violence in Germany (a few weeks ago the tabloid *Bild*, citing sources in the security forces, spoke of 607 wounded in 2011), but above all in Russia where recent years have seen hundreds of attacks, often fatal, on Asian and Caucasian immigrants.

Some networks, from Blood and Honour to Hammerskin, a network originating in the US formed in the middle of the 1980s and present on European territory with various sections, has carried out the often subterranean work of connecting and multiplying these experiences, facilitating the massive penetration of neo-Nazis in the ranks of sports fans in half of Europe's stadiums.

### **The Italian case**

In this broad and varied European framework the specificity of the Italian case stands out because its institutional right is in great part not comparable to other European conservative formations, lacking as it does a real democratic culture. Evidence of this are the electoral agreements and policies concluded with self-declared neofascist formations or the rehabilitation, including through their renaming of squares and streets after fallen fascists who are seen as equivalent to fallen Partisans. These were decisions carried out first by Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale and now by the PdL with the increasingly decisive support of the Northern League.

The recent Future and Freedom split from the PdL not only has not changed this reality but has reinforced it, making plain the substantive failure of the Italian right's attempts at democratic evolution, starting with the transformation of MSI into Alleanza Nazionale.

This is all the more serious if one looks at the direction of development of broad sectors of the extreme right, intent, on the one hand, upon reviving admiration for the deeds of the original fascist movement (see, for example, Casa Pound), and, on the other, evolving toward neo-Nazism. The tendency in this second case is to take up in continually more explicit form historical references, mythologies and symbolisms drawn from the history of the Third Reich. This is not an abstract fact but a new identity which will inevitably have consequences for a society that is increasingly multi-ethnic and socially complex.

We have in mind the re-evaluation undertaken by Forza Nuova of some groups that collaborated with the Nazis in the 1940s: the Romanian Iron Guard and Hungary's Arrow Cross Party. On Forza Nuova's website it is possible to buy gadgets and t-shirts with effigies of Corneliu Codreanu, the founder of the Iron Guard, find pins of the Belgian Waffen-SS divisions or view the flags of the organisation with the Runic wolf-hook used in World War II by 'Das Reich' and by 'Nederland', two of the main SS Panzer divisions.

We also have in mind the glorification of war criminals like Léon Degrelle, the Waffen-SS general, but above all the relaunching of certain conspiracy theories about financial and Masonic circles having caused the current economic crisis. In Italian right-wing radical blogs terms such as 'plutocracy' are returning, accompanied by National Socialist cartoons from the 1930s, with bankers and merchants with protruding hooked noses carving up the world.

### **Lone wolves**

The massacre on 22 July 2011 of 77 people, perpetrated by Anders Behring Breivik in Oslo and Utøya Island in Norway, has deeply shaken democratic public opinion in every part of Europe. The journalist and writer Stieg Larsson (died 2004), author of *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* (Swedish: *Män som hatar kvinnor* = 'Men Who Hate Women') and founder of the journal *Expo*, a careful observer of the neo-Nazi phenomenon in Scandinavia, stressed already in a July 1999 interview for the French daily *Libération* how the evolution of the extreme right in northern Europe was aligning itself with the US model, with the action of isolated individuals and small decentralised groups, whose main target is multicultural society and democracy and its representatives.

One thinks of the bloody events of the last two decades in the USA: from the 1996 car bomb in Oklahoma City (168 dead and 680 wounded) to the attack at the Atlanta Olympic Games (also in 1996), to the 2009 assassination in Wichita, Kansas of George Tiller, the gynaecologist who performed abortions, but also the 2010 arson at the mosque in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

In Florence, on 13 December 2011, Giancarlo Casseri, an activist of Casa Pound shot into the crowd killing two Senegalese peddlers and gravely wounding a third. As with Breivik the event was quickly demoted as the work of mere madness. However, these two figures did not grow up isolated and distant from right-wing radicalism. They only drew the extreme consequences of the xenophobic and fascist culture they were part of, believing that the moment of confrontation had arrived. Two 'lone wolves'.

In addition, the discovery in Germany in November 2011 of a terrorist cell called the National-Socialist Underground, with ties to the NPD, found to be responsible for 10 crimes between 2000 and 2007, nine of which had a racial context, for the most part involving shopkeepers of Turkish origin, tells us more about these tendencies. Investigations revealed how much protection this cell enjoyed on the part of some circles within the security forces.

### **A danger to democracy**

In a study by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on racism and intolerance in Europe, published last March, in response to questionnaires on the influence of Jews in various countries it came to light that 19.7 % of Germans, 21.2 % of Italians, 27.7 % of French, 49.9 % of Poles and 69.2 % of Hungarians thought the influence is great.

These are data to give us pause.

In the epoch-making transition toward an increasingly multicultural society within the development of the current capitalist crisis, we need to be aware both of the disquieting re-emergence of conspiratorial myths and ancient obsessions about racial purity, which we thought we had left far behind, and of the danger to civil and democratic coexistence represented by the contemporary populist and radical right, East and West. As a whole, however differentiated, it is a vehicle for obscurantism, violence and racism.

## **Right-wing political models for the future of Europe: What is the Political Right up to in the European Parliament?**

Thilo Janssen

### **Crisis of neoliberal capitalism and the rise of right-wing parties in Europe**

In the beginning of 2012, representative democracy in Europe is in bad shape. The financial, economic and severe social crisis of neoliberal capitalism threatens the achievements of 60 years of European integration. The relationship between freedom and solidarity, between democracy and the welfare state, has been dangerously put into question. Elected governments in Greece and Italy have been replaced by technocrats who shall fulfil the austerity demands of “Merkozy” and the Troika (European Central Bank, EU Commission, and International Monetary Fund). The fear of losing up in the dismantling of social welfare and opportunities of political participation gives room to the simple messages of the political right: Back to the nation state, “we” against the “others”, or “our” workers first. Right-wing parties are on a historical height in many European Union Member States. Hungary’s Premier Victor Orban, leader of the Fidesz party, is building up a nationalist and authoritarian state on grounds of his two-third majority in Parliament. In addition, according to recent polls, the Hungarian neo-Fascist Jobbik party would even gain more votes than in the election result of 2010 when it reached 17 percent. In neighbouring Austria, the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs might get up to 30 percent in the next elections and could become the strongest party in the national Parliament in 2013. Front National’s leader Marine Le Pen with her 16 percent in the polls for the presidential elections in France pushes Nicolas Sarkozy to use racist slogans, as she will probably collect many votes from Sarkozy’s potential right-wing supporters. The nationalists Perussuomalaiset (True Fins) shattered the political system of consensus in Finland, while the Dansk Folkeparti temporarily succeeded in pushing for reinforced border controls in Denmark. Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid, forced the Netherlands’ conservative-liberal minority government to block the Schengen accession of Romania and Bulgaria. In Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, right-wing marchers – with the support of conservative parties and government officials – year in and year out publicly commemorate their “national heroes” like the Latvian SS-Legion, the collaborationists that fought in the German “war of extermination” against the USSR. Meanwhile, the only two governments in the EU that refused to sign the German-originated Fiscal Compact<sup>1</sup> were those from the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic. For David Cameron’s Conservative Party and Petr Nečas’ Občanská Demokratická Strana, the leading members of the national-conservative Europarty Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR), the new treaty interfered too deeply with national sovereignty.

### **A crisis of political representation: Right-wing electorate**

Scientific literature shows that social classes and milieus whose (material) interests are not being politically represented anymore within post-industrial socioeconomic structures tend to vote for right-wing parties. Kessler and Freeman<sup>2</sup> write that “predominantly manual workers, the unemployed, and the low and moderately educated” – meaning all those, whose chances to sell their skin on liberalised European service markets are relatively poor – “are most inclined to blame foreigners and ethnic minorities for adverse conditions and turn towards the extreme right”. Although, different other factors<sup>3</sup> also play an important role in voting decisions towards the political right (gender, age, non-existent social networks, national party systems, historical discourses), the fight against re-nationalisation and for an open European society can not be separated from the struggle for social equality and political participation on EU level. Social-demographic data from the European Commission’s Eurobarometer<sup>4</sup> opinion surveys indicates that citizens’ support for the European integration process is linked to their social background: Those identifying themselves as coming from the relatively affluent part of society are more in favour of the EU than those from the lower classes.

Furthermore, Braun et al. show that negative attitudes towards European integration and immigration correlate significantly.<sup>5</sup> While capitalism is in a historical crisis and political decisions are – or seem to be – taken in faraway Brussels, Berlin or by the financial markets, right-wing parties promise populist policies of national insulation. On the one hand, they steer the popular anger towards the weak. Citizens from indebted states are being defamed. Immigrants and minorities become the target of racist campaigns. On the other, European integration is blamed for being the root of all evil. Almost all right-wing parties from neo-liberal national conservatives to the ethno-nationalist opponents of “globalism” agree: The European Union should, if it is to exist at all, be an alliance of national states and never be a political sphere of social and political equality with federal-democratic, state-like institutions. Nevertheless, the rightists have a strong presence in precisely that EU institution which – as its representatives are directly elected by the European citizens – comes closest to being a democratic federal body: the European Parliament.

### Right-wing groups in the European Parliament

| <b>Table 1: Right-wing groups in the European Parliament since 2009</b><br><i>(not necessarily congruent with Europarties)</i> |   |         |   |
|--|---|---------|---|
| <b>ECR</b>   | European Conservatives and Reformists Group | 52 MEPs | □ <i>congruent with AECR-Europarty</i>                          |
| <b>EFD</b>   | Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group       | 34 MEPs | ≈ <i>partially connected with EAF-Europarty</i>                 |
| <b>NI</b>  | “Non Inscrits” (Non-attached) <sup>44</sup> | 24 MEPs | ≈ <i>some are connected to the Europarties EAF- and/or EANM</i> |

After the 2009 European elections the parliamentary centre of gravity shifted further to the right<sup>7</sup>. The parliamentary group of the European People’s Party (EPP) – containing the (predominantly) moderate conservative parties in the EU – is by far the biggest faction (271 MEPs<sup>8</sup>). To the right of it two new parliamentary groups have been formed: the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR, 52 MEPs) and Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD, 34 MEPs). In the camp of the non-attached MEPs (NI – French: “Non Inscrits”) there exist also a number of right-wing parties, some of which in 2007 formed a parliamentary group called Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty<sup>9</sup> (ITS). However, the group broke apart after a few months of existence because their members mutually insulted each other in a racist manner. After the 2009 elections these parties were not integrated into the EFD and were numerically too insignificant (at least 25 MEPs needed) and too at odds among themselves to gain parliamentary group status again.

### Right-wing Europarties and their models for the future of Europe

What are the actual political offers of right-wing parties for the future of Europe? Besides the right-wing parliamentary groups in the European Parliament (Table 1), parties and MEPs have also organized themselves into a wide range of structures both inside and outside the Parliament. Most important in this regard are the Europarties (Table 2), i.e. political parties on European Union level. The analysis of their programmes gives us a picture about their future models for Europe.

<sup>44</sup>Not all NI MEPs come from right-wing parties: only 24 out of 30 (17/04/2012)

| <b>Table 2: Right wing Europarties 2012</b><br>(official Parties at European level, financed by the European Parliament) |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>AECR</b>  | Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists | □ <i>congruent with ECR group</i>               |
| <b>EAF</b>   | European Alliance for Freedom                     | ≈ <i>partially affiliated with EFD group</i>    |
| <b>EANM</b>  | European Alliance of National Movements           | - <i>not connected to a parliamentary group</i> |

### **AECR Europarty: Fatherland and Neoliberalism**

The parties of the ECR parliamentary group have formed the Europarty Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR) in 2009. ECR and AECR are almost congruent. The hegemonic national delegation in the ECR parliamentary group is the British Conservative Party with 26 MEPs, followed by the Czech Občanská Demokratická Strana with currently 9 MEPs, the two Polish parties Prawo i Sprawiedliwość and Polska Jest Najważniejsza and smaller party delegations from different countries with mostly only one representative. Their future model for Europe can be summarised with the words fatherland and neoliberalism: Upholding of the “sovereign integrity of the nation state”, “opposition to EU federalism”, “free enterprise” and “small government”, the family as the “bedrock of society”, “[e]ffectively controlled immigration and an end to the abuse of asylum procedures”<sup>10</sup>. The AECR widely continues to pursue the national, neo-liberal small-government ideology represented by the British Conservatives over the past 30 years. Because of the hegemony of the Conservative Party, the AECR does not openly transport xenophobic or homophobic positions. This led to the leaving of four Polish MEPs from the ECR parliamentary group to join the more radical EFD, stating among other reasons that there was not enough space for propagating the “protection of the family and marriage as a union of woman and man”<sup>11</sup>. The dominant AECR parties represent a part of the political establishment in their home countries and are regularly part of national governments (Conservative Party and Petr Nečas’ Občanská Demokratická Strana presently, Jarosław Kaczyński’s Prawo i Sprawiedliwość until 2007).

### **EANM and EAF Europarties: ethnic nationalism and anti-imperialism**

The second right-wing model for Europe can be summarised with the terms ethnic nationalism and anti-imperialism. The national parties with this common ideology are less homogeneously organised on EU level than those in the AECR Europarty. Their most important European organisations are the Europarties European Alliance of National Movements (EANM) and the European Alliance for Freedom (EAF). In the European Parliament there are no parliamentary groups that are congruent with these Europarties. The MEPs of the EANM and the EAF are mostly non-attached; some belong to the EFD parliamentary group.

On 24 October 2009 the European Alliance of National Movements (EANM) was founded on the initiative of Jobbik and the Front National. Its members furthermore include the British National Party and some smaller parties not represented in the European Parliament: Fiamma Tricolore of Italy, Movimiento Social Republicano of Spain, Front National of Belgium, Nationaldemokraterna of Sweden, and the Partido Nacional Renovador of Portugal. Another party from a state not belonging to the EU is the Ukrainian Svoboda. In 2012 the Europarty was officially recognised by the European Parliament and can therefore rely on funds up to 290.000 Euro for this year. The EANM sees itself as an anti-globalization, anti-imperialist movement of national parties opposed to a European super state and social dumping. The Europarty want to preserve national identity and tradition (also referred to as “indigenous culture”), and to defend “Christian values” and “natural law”. They make propaganda

against the financial capital, immigrants and open borders. Furthermore, their enemies are the “EU elites”, Marxists, and minorities (Muslims, Homosexuals, Roma).

The second extreme right-wing Europarty, the European Alliance for Freedom (EAF), comes from the same national political party spectrum. Its members are foremost individuals and not national parties; as a result there is some personal overlapping with the EAF. The EAF tries to appear as a reputable and moderate political platform against EU federalism. The party symbol is a stylized, brightly coloured butterfly, and the website presents itself in a friendly pale blue, the colour of the EFD parliamentary group in the European Parliament, while the slogan: “The people’s voice in Europe” also echoes the EFD (whose slogan is the “People’s Voice”)<sup>12</sup>. The EAF Europarty is also a strategic bridge between members of the EFD, independent right-wing parties in the European Parliament, and groupings which are currently not represented in Brussels or Strasbourg. The EAF states it wants to eliminate the “left-right political paradigm” in the fight against an emerging EU “super state”. The dominant figures in the new party are

Godfrey Bloom (United Kingdom Independence Party, United Kingdom, EFD)  
Rolandas Paksas / Juozas Imbrasas (Tvaraka Ir Teisingumas, Lithuania, EFD)  
Franz Obermayr / Andreas Mölzer (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, non-attached)  
Krisztina Morvai (Jobbik, Hungary, non-attached)  
Philip Claves (Vlaams Belang, Belgium, non-attached)  
Marine Le Pen (Front National, France, non-attached),

and others who are currently not present in the European Parliament, such as their secretary general Sharon Ellul-Bonici, a Social Democratic anti-EU activist of Malta. As an officially recognised Europarty the EAF can obtain up to around 360.000 Euros for the year 2012 from the European Parliament. The first campaign the EAF wants to start on EU level is a European Citizens’ Initiative<sup>13</sup> against the accession of Turkey to the EU.

### **EFD parliamentary group: United against migrants, minorities and Turkey accession**

The Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) parliamentary group has currently got 34 members. The two dominant national parties in the EFD are the United Kingdom Independence Party (9 MEPs) and the Italian Lega Nord (9 MEPs). Other members of the EFD who are all not affiliated with a Europarty are the Slovak Slovenská Národná Strana, Perussuomalaiset (True Fins), the Greek Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós, or the Danish ethno-nationalist Dansk Folkeparti. There is no congruent Europarty for the EFD. Especially members of the United Kingdom Independent Party argue that having a Europarty would actually approve the existence of the “modern day Völkerkerker” EU (EFD president Nigel Farage). British MEPs left the EFD claiming the group was still too EU friendly and some members were racists (referring to Lega Nord MEP Mario Borghezio, who – inter alia – said he was in favour of Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik’s political ideas). Nevertheless, three EFD members are affiliated with the Europarty EAF, along them Godfrey Bloom from the United Kingdom Independence Party and the two MEPs from the Lithuanian Tvaraka Ir Teisingumas. The main common political topic of the EFD seems, at first glance, to be the “no’ to an EU super state”, but in practice the EFD is heterogeneous even on this point. MEPs from Eastern European countries and – surprisingly – even from the Greek Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós party sometimes refer positively to the EU integration process. EFD members do also not have much in common regarding political fields like economy, social or environmental policy. But there are three main topics of nearly consensus in the EFD: The position against immigration, against minorities (such as the Roma) and against the possible accession of Turkey to the EU. Furthermore, there is a lot of anti-Communist ideology and conspiracy theories (for example: the Bilderberg Group as a secret world government) that the different parties share.

## **Lone wolves: Partij voor de Vrijheid and Partidul România Mare**

Not all national right-wing parties have joined political structures on EU level. The five MEPs of the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid have so far been pursuing their own agenda and keep separate from the other right-wing groups in the EU Parliament and from the Europarties. The party pursues a national, social-Darwinist economic liberalism against all who are economically weak, against immigrants, “Islam”, and a “European super state”. The party tried to draw media attention demanding a ban on headscarves in EU institutions or with the attempt to nominate their leader Geert Wilders for the European Parliament’s Sakharov Prize.

The Romanian right-wing extremists from the Partidul România Mare have lost their ties with other parties. Party leader and MEP Vadim Tudor’s remarks about CIA conspiracies or a possible mass murder against Romanian citizens committed by the Romanian government seemed to be too far-fetched even for his old comrades from the former Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty parliamentary group.

## **Conclusion: The far-right’s cross-party cooperation for a Europe of nations**

With few exemptions, there is widespread networking and cross party cooperation within the far-right camp on European level. The most commonly shared issues of working relations within the European Parliament are the hostilities towards minorities such as Roma, immigrants, and the rejection of Turkey’s accession to the European Union. Within the European Parliament’s working processes the latter two issues have been used to foster cooperation within the non-attached right-wing camp (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, British National Party, Front National and Jobbik against Turkey accession) as well as between non-attached and EFD MEPs (the non-attached Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs and Vlaams Belang with the EFD parties Danks Folkeparti, Lega Nord and Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos against immigration) in the form of common resolutions or Written Declarations. The supra-party cooperation shows that there is scarcely any clear dividing line between the EFD parliamentary group and the independent rightists as regards right-wing ideology. Moreover, EFD parties such as Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos, Dansk Folkeparti, Lega Nord or Slovenská Národná Strana disseminate just as xenophobic and chauvinist slogans as the non-attached MEPs of the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, Vlaams Belang, or Jobbik.

The present practice in the European Parliament of treating the EFD as a more or less normal parliamentary group and involving it in many joint motions for resolutions therefore cannot be justified either from a human-rights or a democratic perspective. Furthermore, the rightist network project EAF shows that EFD members from the United Kingdom Independence Party and Tvarka Ir Teisingumas work together strategically with the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, Jobbik, Front National, and Vlaams-Belang MEPs.

The more the EFD, as a parliamentary group allied with the EAF, is integrated by the democratic parliamentary groups in the EU Parliament, the more racism, nationalism and racial views of society will appear to be acceptable positions in the democratic spectrum. Whether a European Citizens’ Initiative as announced by the EAF against the accession of Turkey to the EU might be successful remains to be seen. In consequence, it would most certainly not only be directed against the state and the government of Turkey, but against migrants, Muslims and the democratic plurality in general.

| Table 3: Membership in Europarties and political groups in the European Parliament (Spring 2012)   |  |   |  |   |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| Europarty  | AECR - Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists   | EANM - European Alliance of National Movements  | EAF - European Alliance for Freedom (hauptsächlich Einzelmitgliedschaften)   | No party or personal membership in official Europarty   |
| Political Group in the European Parliament   |  |   |  |   |
| <b>ECR - Group European Conservatives and Reformists Group (52 MEPs)</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conservative Party (UK)</li> <li>- Občanská Demokratická Strana (CZ)</li> <li>- Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PL)</li> <li>- Polska Jest Najważniejsza (PL)</li> <li>- Lijst Dedecker (BE)</li> <li>- Magyar Demokrata Fórum (HU)</li> <li>- ChristenUnie (NL)</li> <li>- Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK (LV)</li> <li>- Lietuvos Lenkų Rinkimų Akcija (LT)</li> </ul> |   |  |   |
| <b>EFD - Group Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group (34 MEPs)</b>                                 |  |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Godfrey Bloom (United Kingdom Independence Party, UK)</li> <li>- Rolandas Paksas / Juozas Imbrasas (Tvarka ir Teisingumas, LT)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lega Nord (IT)</li> <li>- Dansk Folkeparti (DK)</li> <li>- Mouvement pour la France (FR)</li> <li>- Perussuomalaiset (FI)</li> <li>- Laikos Orthodoxos Synagemos (GR)</li> <li>- Slovenská Národná Strana (SK)</li> <li>- Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij (NE)</li> <li>- Io amo l'Italia (IT)</li> </ul> |
| <b>NI - Non Inscrits (non-attached parties) 24 MEPs - here only those from right-wing parties)</b> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jobbik (HU)</li> <li>- Front National (FR)</li> <li>- British National Party (UK)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Krisztina Morvai (Jobbik, HU)</li> <li>- Marine Le Pen (Front National, FR)</li> <li>- Franz Obermayr / Andreas Mölzer (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, AT)</li> <li>- Philip Clayes (Vlaams Belang, BE)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ataka (BG)</li> <li>- Partidul România Mare (RO)</li> <li>- Partij voor de Vrijheid (NL)</li> <li>- Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (AT)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Not represented in the European Parliament</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alternativ Demokratesch Reformpartei (LU)</li> <li>- Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn (IS)</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fiamma Tricolore (IT)</li> <li>- Movimento Social Republicano (ES)</li> <li>- Front National (BE)</li> <li>- Nationaldemokraterna (SE)</li> <li>- Partido Nacional Renovador (PT)</li> <li>- Svoboda (UA)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Torsten Groß (Bürger in Wut, DE)</li> <li>- Kent Ekeröth (Sverigedemokraterna, SE)</li> <li>- Sharon Ellul-Bonici (Labour Party, MT)</li> </ul>   |   |

## Confronting the Extreme Right: A Challenge for the Left Lessons Learned From the 2012 Elections in France

Elisabeth Gauthier

### **The upsurge of the extreme, nationalist and xenophobic right has become general in Europe.**<sup>45</sup>

“Established at the core and not at the margins of societies, they have become factors that count not only in political and ideological confrontations but also in constituting governing majorities, in countries with very varied political traditions and life conditions”.<sup>46</sup>

Dealing with this sort of right wing is unquestionably a challenge for the alternative left. Taking up this challenge means first of all grasping the specificity of the extreme, nationalist, xenophobic and authoritarian right; and, second, it means correctly analysing the realities on whose bases these parties have built their influence as well as the paths pursued in doing so; third, it is a matter of understanding the function these parties fulfil at a given moment in the political system of their countries. It is starting with these issues that the alternative left can try to define the terms of a counter-offensive. The paths and results of the construction of a counter-offensive today constitute a fifth area of reflection. The analysis of the Front National (FN) in France, especially in the spring 2012 electoral season, forms the basis of the following reflections.

### **On the nature of the FN**

If from 1990 to 2000, the FN and other parties of its political family were often qualified as being “populist” right, there was in fact a need to demonstrate that what was emerging in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a new type of formation of the extreme right at the core of societies, some of which are marked by extreme right, even fascist traditions. Thus in the FN, as in other parties, one could see a permanent tension between the maintenance of an extreme right heritage and the wish to escape marginality and play a role at the heart of the political systems. It was necessary to demonstrate that these parties, some of which rapidly acquired a large and enduring audience, did not in any way resemble little extreme right groups but were aiming at a new hegemony by presenting themselves as the only “anti-systemic” forces. Currently, in a country like France where Sarkozy and the UMP have taken up a good number of the issues and elements of political discourse previously only developed by the FN, the labelling of the FN as “populist right” does not permit a suitable characterisation of the differences between the forces of the right. Moreover, the use of the adjective “populist” – an evolving concept – has shown its limits and shortcomings in regard to what needs to be described. What is more, the right which is called “classical”, like the UMP in France under Sarkozy, has taken up “populist” accents, all the while shaping them in a right-wing way from the point of view of the issues and contents proposed, with an aim to siphon off the FN’s following. This orientation of the UMP in the context of the repeated electoral contests between Sarkozy and the FN against the background of the acute crisis and the sharpened social confrontations has made the totality of the right-wing forces shift increasingly to the right. The time when Jacques Chirac opted for a “cordon sanitaire” strategy vis-à-vis the FN is well and truly over.

The presence of the extreme right in France has assumed massive dimensions since the 1980s. The FN has found very favourable conditions for gaining a foothold in national politics, notably thanks to the working class disillusion with the policies of the “governmental left” which has taken hold since Mitterrand’s neoliberal turn in 1983.<sup>47</sup> The weakness of the radical left has become structural. Other

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<sup>45</sup> *Transform ! european journal for alternative thinking and dialogue* 08/2011 and 09/ 2011 are two issues analysing the populist and extreme right in Europe. See [www.transform-network.org](http://www.transform-network.org) (and for the French edition [www.espaces-marx.net](http://www.espaces-marx.net)).

<sup>46</sup> Walter Baier / Elisabeth Gauthier, “Crise, Europe et success de la Droite populiste et extrême”, *Temps modernes* 2012

<sup>47</sup> A number of studies, such as those of Michalat / Simon, have shown that the popular classes and especially left-wing workers tend increasingly towards abstentionism, while those on the right tend to radicalise themselves within the right.

factors may be cited such as the trivialisation of the FN by a great part of the forces present and the borrowings from the extreme right by Sarkozy and those near him. With the deepening of the crisis, the FN can rely on the divisions within the subaltern classes, which are constantly aggravated by neoliberal policies, as well as on the growing malaise created by the EU structure. In a context in which anger and exasperation find no positive political expression, resentments can easily gain the upper hand and become usable by the xenophobic and nationalist right.

In 2012, with 17 %, the FN achieved a record in the presidential elections for the second time since 2002. In 11 of 22 regions as well as 43 départements, Marine Le Pen got more than 20 % of the votes. Through its political positioning as the alleged “anti-system party” and despite Sarkozy’s attempts to address FN voters with his continually more rightist discourse, the FN could garner more votes than ever before in a presidential election. The FN succeeded in setting the political issues, and in this often got help from Sarkozy’s camp, for example when the government launched campaigns on issues such as “France’s national identity”, the deportation of Roma and the alleged contradictions between Islam and the Republic. Although 77 % of French people polled cited unemployment as their biggest concern, 53 % the question of purchasing power and the quality of the health system, 49 % the school system and the quality of instruction, and only 15 % the integration of the different social components of society, the question of immigration was continually accorded a disproportionately large space in the political debate.

The vote total of all candidacies in the left spectrum in the first ballot was 43.6 % in comparison to 36 % in the 2007 elections. The total of the whole “left part of the left” was almost 13 % (as against ca. 8 % in 2007), in which the Front de Gauche (11%) represents a pole with a new political quality. The UMP with Sarkozy (27.2 %), the FN (17.9 %) and the (rightist) Bayrou Centre were weakened. Under the influence of the Front de Gauche’s offensive, the left / right polarisation was sharpened. As a whole, vis-à-vis 2007 the weight has shifted from right to left, and at the same time Sarkozy himself has become more “rightist” and the FN stronger. Not just in the electoral campaign but during his entire time in office the president has shifted his language and politics to the right, even striking an unequivocally Pétainist tone. The “Bloc of People Willing to Work”, which Sarkozy put together in 2007 under the influence of large sections of radical right voters, has rapidly fallen apart and could not even be saved through the role of the “president as defender against the crisis”.

Marine Le Pen made it publicly known that in the second ballot she would vote for neither of the two candidates,<sup>48</sup> that “the battle for France has just begun” and that in the future the FN would be the “party of patriots” – whether of the left or the right. She interprets the FN’s votes not as protest but as “a vote supporting protectionist policies”. While the UMP, after its failure, will fight over the successor to Sarkozy, Le Pen will become the leader of the opposition, according to her campaign manager. For the FN the moment has thus come to turn Sarkozy’s failure into the collapse of the UMP with the aim of playing a central role in the recomposition of the right.<sup>49</sup>

### **The crisis and the extreme right’s rhetoric**

Compared to the last election in 2007, Marine Le Pen this time was able to speak to broader layers of the electorate. In this sense, on the one hand, she promised a turning away from Sarkozy’s policies and, on the other hand, apparently moderated her father’s discourse. Thus she and her cohorts promise, for example, a “strong state” and a rescinding of the very unpopular reforms in the public services introduced in 2007, which resulted in massive job cuts in the public administrations. In questions of domestic security and immigration FN’s positions remain staunchly radical right. Sometimes formulations milder than those of her father are used: She has rephrased his favourite slogan “*préférence nationale*”, the privileging of French people in the allocation of jobs and social services, as “*priorité nationale*”, but the meaning is the same.

<sup>48</sup> Only 50 % of FN voters (in contrast to 70 % in 2007) voted for Sarkozy in the second ballot, a sixth abstained and a third voted for Hollande.

<sup>49</sup> The dike between the electorates of the FN and Sarkozy has broken; now 54 % to 70 % of the UMP voters and 68 % to 77 % of the FN’s voters are, according to polls, in favour of official electoral accords between the two formations.

Nationalism mixed with xenophobia, racism, Islamophobia and, always and still, antisemitism characterises the extreme right's discourse. At the same time, we see the extreme right adapting to the contradictions that generated the great crisis as they adopt a discourse described as “**neo-social**” without in the least abandoning their liberal positioning on the economic level. In this period of the sharpening of the social crisis, such that from now on it involves not just the working classes but also entire sections of the middle classes, this “neo-social” discourse is based on the neoliberal concept of “meritocracy”. It is no longer principles of solidarity nor of social and democratic rights, which underlie social action; rather aid has to be *individually* merited and is justified by belonging to the “community”. Certainly, the growing insecurity is acknowledged within this outlook, but only while displacing the points of conflict. The intention is to make people forget all that has to do with social conflict, class conflict, to make everything an individual issue, in conformity with the concept of meritocracy and neoliberal ideology. It is an attempt to represent “those below” while simultaneously capturing the resentments of the better off strata and sharpening the divisions in society. The conflict between “us” and “them” has multiple expressions according to countries or political moments, with racist and xenophobic attitudes hostile to any kind of “minority”, but also increasingly based on a distinction between the “deserving” and the “freeloaders”, the “slackers”, the outsiders of all sorts devoid of any merit. This posture is not too different from what the UMP developed in France around the idea of “the subsidised” (as a social group). In the framework of austerity policy, unheard of social regression, social and political confrontation around the issue of public debt, such “neo-social” discourse can have great resonance. This type of programme of exclusion seeks at the same time to rehabilitate “demands for authority, law and order and work and meritocracy that are not just fundamental values of the reactionary right but are an integral part of a workers’, or at least a popular, culture with conservative, authoritarian and often ethnocentric leanings”.<sup>50</sup>

If the FN's electorate cuts across all social layers, its core base is often composed of working class milieux threatened by modernisation, of artisans and storekeepers and, increasingly, of middle strata threatened with social insecurity. Up to 2007 the FN had always won influence among the popular strata and right-wing workers and since 2007 this has not changed. However, we can see a class effect on the right when the choice is between the classic and the frontist right. The “class preference in favour of a ‘rupture right’, to the detriment of centrism or of a ‘government’ right, is particularly appreciable in the more working-class section of the population”.<sup>51</sup>

In recent years, the FN's electoral results increasingly reflect an approval of the solutions it proposes in articulating “*préférence nationale*” and the rejection of immigrants. Protest has mutated to be adherence to these supposed solutions. The FN vote crystallises social anxieties and in 2012 is making inroads into the urban peripheries, reaching people of modest background, workers, employees, youth without degrees, excluded from the cities where living has become unaffordable, finding themselves isolated, facing at times insurmountable transportation problems, far from public services, with a growing sense of abandon. Social fragmentation is from now on accompanied by spatial fragmentation, with a “France périphérique” that has been discarded by the big cities several dozen kilometres away and living beyond the banlieues.<sup>52</sup> Here too, criticism of the European Union is also one of the mobilising factors along with the criticism of “globalisation” developed around a “national-social” cocktail. But nothing justifies characterising the FN as being close to a right-wing “anti-capitalist” option. Certainly, those near to the FN are “much more favourable to raising taxes on large assets, much more worried by the increase in unemployment or the danger of the disappearance of public services” than are UMP voters, but “their rebellion seems to stay within a respect for a social, economic and societal order to which they hardly seem less attached than the sympathisers of the non-frontist right”.<sup>53</sup> The level of sympathy for the FN grows when “the difficulties experienced and the feeling of revolt that they spark” are attributed “to the omnipresence of immigrants who cost ‘us’, taking ‘our’

<sup>50</sup> Jean-Yves Camus, “New Aspects of the Radical Right”. In: *Transform* !08/2011.

<sup>51</sup> Guy Michalat / Michel Simon. *Le peuple, la crise et la politique. Etude éditée par la Fondation Gabriel Péri*, La Pensée - Supplément to issue 368 (2011), p. 94.

<sup>52</sup> Christophe Guilly, *Fractures françaises*, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Michalat / Simon, p. 105.

jobs, multiplying acts of incivility and violence and whom ‘our’ policies give and permit everything, while ‘no one’ is doing anything for ‘us’.”<sup>54</sup> A poll<sup>55</sup> shows that the elements of “anger” and “protest” in the FN’s vote go hand in hand with strong indifference to society, reflecting a deep “social selfishness”.

## Political system and the function of the FN

To be more effective and create a true left counter-offensive, the critique of the FN has to be brought up to date. In a country like France it is important not just to look at the FN’s language and its impact on the electorate but also the function the FN has in the political system. Only on the basis of all these observations will it be at least possible for the left to conceive of a counter-offensive, a new dynamic which could end by gaining the upper hand on the FN.

For years, if not for decades, the constituents of the alternative / radical left in France have worn themselves out in developing a vigorous but more effective critique of the FN. The moral, republican critique was dominant as well as a strategy dubbed the “republican front” which assumes the establishing of an alliance of the socialist and communist left with the republican right when the FN threatens to win a parliamentary mandate in one of the electoral wards. Thus the FN was more criticised as a menace to the Republic than as an adversary in the class conflict. When the integrating function of the Republic weakens and erodes, when it itself – far from ideal of the Social Republic – takes on the function of excluding whole populations on the social and citizenship levels, then the arguments criticising the FN as anti-republican or dangerous for the Republic naturally lose their force.

The absence of a proportional electoral system in the presidential and legislative elections creates certain perversions. In this context the FN is used as a foil to drum up votes for one of the two principal parties in the framework of a majoritarian electoral system. The Parti Socialiste (PS) is thus a past master in the art of appealing to electors to cast a “useful vote” in giving their vote in the first ballot to the biggest party on the left.

In fact, since the 2002 presidential elections, when as a candidate Jospin (PS) was eliminated in the first ballot, with only Chirac (on the right) and Le Pen standing in the second ballot, this argument has worked perfectly. Once the FN is present, and not just at the level of the presidential election, but at that of many electoral wards,<sup>56</sup> the fear is widely fanned that if the vote is dispersed in the first ballot, the 2002 scenario could be repeated. Many voters who share a left critique are thus led to vote – often without conviction – for the PS already in the first ballot. In this way the PS and the media raise the spectre of the FN as a threat to the political system<sup>57</sup> without deepening their critique of the FN.

Moreover, when the political system itself is largely contested and perceived as something external and alienating, a critique of the FN in this context loses its effectiveness. Quite the contrary, everything that feeds knee-jerk reflexes instead of appealing to reason cannot but favour the position of the FN, which is trying to present itself as “anti-system”.

On the one side, the FN benefits from this situation, and, on the other, fear of this party contributes – at least for now – to stabilising a two-party system, that is, the dominance of the pillars of the political system whose social and political base is progressively eroding. At the same time, the disintegration of democracy and the emergence of a new oligarchy as the power centre feed the

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<sup>54</sup> Michalat / Simon, p. 107.

<sup>55</sup> Published by *Libération* April 25, 2012.

<sup>56</sup> In the legislative elections, people vote in the 577 electoral wards according to the model of the presidential elections: The two candidates who are on top in the first ballot can present themselves in the second ballot. Moreover, when a candidate achieves 12.5 % of those registered (that is, not of the eligible voters, not of the electorate), he can stay for the second ballot even if he has come third or fourth in the first ballot. Thus if the FN scores well (more than 20 % of voters), three-candidate elections at the second ballot could make a candidate lose, who in the case of a two-candidate election would have won.

<sup>57</sup> In the last days before the 2012 presidential elections fear of Le Pen was energetically stoked once again – for example, by means of a front page in *Libération* three days before the election with a giant photo of “Le Pen as a Threat !!!” – this in order to mobilise the voters’ reflexes in favour of Sarkozy or Hollande. Sarkozy was not, however, able to absorb the FN’s votes.

critique of the “system” that the FN is building. The FN is developing a language of systemic critique without actually taking up the basic questions of the economic-social conflict. Thus, for the political right and corporate milieu it plays the role of a “useful devil”, which through its performance and the reactions it calls forth deflects debate away from the real problems or the nature of the conflict and thus hampers the development of class consciousness.

In a period characterised by “post-democracy” phenomena and the transition to forms of oligarchic governance, the FN constitutes a sort of barrier against the political discontinuities and reconstructions of great breadth that could really put on the agenda a calling into question of the mode of domination and a break with it. From this point of view it is intriguing to see how intense the efforts of the dominant forces and the media are to equate genuine Neo-Nazis with SYRIZIA, the radical left formation which has just become the first party of the left in Greece in the wake of the austerity attacks on the Greek population. Attempts have become more frequent in different European countries to stir up the voters’ fears of “dangerous extremists” of all sorts to the benefit of parties called “reasonable” but which have been largely delegitimised.

### **The offensive of the Front de Gauche**

Recognising not only the danger the FN represents for democracy and social justice but also the double barrier it represents in blocking the political system and raising powerful obstacles to the formation of a modern class consciousness, the Front de Gauche, and in particular its presidential candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, has decided to take up the challenge – after years of renunciation and political weakness on the left – the goal being that of preventing the FN from sterilising a part of the popular anger, working for a rebirth of the will for change through a left perspective. What is involved is countering “apolitical resentment” (André Tosel), which is the political motor of the FN. The latter has in fact captured a minority of the French majority that no longer identifies with either left or right.<sup>58</sup> In the context of the crisis, which is no longer an abstract concept but a phenomenon of daily life, a breaking point seems to have been reached in the evolution of consciousness: The vision which is opening up is no longer that of a France with two or more speeds, but the picture of two Frances, which are moving away from each other by developing in opposite directions.<sup>59</sup>

To counter the class war that the rich are in the course of winning, “the Front de Gauche’s campaign around Jean-Luc Mélenchon has rehabilitated in public discussion the existence of social classes, their struggles and their consciousness”.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, remaining at a level of discourse that criticises inequalities tends to valorise the consumer and not the citizen, masks antagonistic class conflict and makes room for divisions which impede the formation of a social bloc for change. Contrary to the recommendations of a political foundation close to the PS, which proposed it mould its politics even more to the middle strata and those with higher-education degrees, the working class milieu being too distant from the left, the Front de Gauche has opted for the opposite position. For it there is no question of slighting these first victims of the crisis. What this involves is an attempt at an ideological reconquest, pushing back support for the FN’s simplistic, dangerous and destructive “solutions” to the crisis, and convincing people of the possibility of radically different crisis outcomes based on solidarity, equal rights and collective progress. It is indeed this approach concretised by Mélenchon in his “educational meetings” that interested people and drew crowds, the aim being to substitute resentment with reason, feelings of impotence and withdrawal with hope and divisiveness with a solidaristic approach – to show the potential force of a “mestizo society” in the face of the domination of financial milieu, to counter despair and exasperation, on whose bases the FN thrives, by proposing a left political ambition founded on a different logic with the programme “human beings first” and a strategy of breaking with the dominant logic in order concretely to change the course of

<sup>58</sup> Christophe Gully, *Le Monde*, May 25, 2011. A poll in 2010 (Sofres/CEVIPOF) estimates at 67 % the number of those in France who no longer have trust in either the left or the right, a particularly strong phenomenon in working class milieux.

<sup>59</sup> Alain Mergier / Jérôme Fourquet. *Le point de rupture. Enquête sur les ressorts du vote FN en milieux populaires*. Fondation Jean Jaurès, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Monique Pinçon-Charlot, sociologist and co-author of the bestseller *Le Président des riches*, in *L’Humanité*, April 27, 2012.

things. The central slogans “la place au peuple” (the streets to the people) and “prenez le pouvoir” (take the power) were given concrete content. Thus the theme on March 18 was the “Sixth Republic” contrasted to the increasingly dysfunctional and excluding Fifth Republic. On this basis it was possible to link the idea, strongly anchored in the French left, of a social republic to the need for a new egalitarian and integrative social model. A study has shown that “prenez le pouvoir” was the most effective of all the electoral slogans this season. Mélenchon was able to counter the initially very intense accusations of populism by this offensive that tied “la place au peuple” to a class standpoint. It was thus also possible on this terrain to attack Le Pen directly point by point with political (and not moralising) arguments showing how much Le Pen does occupy a class standpoint, indeed precisely the polar opposite one. In so doing, the attempt of the FN to appear to be outside of the system, against the system and outside the right / left dichotomy, crumbled. Voter migration figures show that there is no movement from Le Pen voters to the Front de Gauche whose content and dynamic has clearly caused difficulties for Le Pen, though without up to now being able to stop his dynamism.

It is really the Front de Gauche’s campaign that furnished the basis of the effort frontally to oppose Marine Le Pen’s offensive. Only the Front de Gauche exposed FN’s system-supporting character. It is interesting to observe that Le Pen’s ideological discourse only works as long as it does not have to answer precise arguments; when it does, however, it becomes visible that she is in fact on the far right. In order to avoid such a situation Le Pen, in a TV debate, refused to address Mélenchon, who was sitting right in front of her, a tactic which, however, turned against her.

The positioning of the Front de Gauche’s campaign, on the one hand, contributed to a revitalising of the left / right cleavage and thus made impossible any rapprochement of the PS with the centre. On the other hand, the FN increasingly appeared as a party situated on the right of the right and one which lauds liberalism on the economic and social level. As a consequence, the FN’s long-time strategy aiming at blurring the left / right cleavage has also failed.

The simmering anger often has difficulty in defining its object and in finding exactly whom it should confront, which is a cause of exhaustion and renunciation. The sharpening of the crisis has simultaneously reinforced anger and impotence. The lack of the power of interpretation as regards capitalism’s large-scale transformations, the lack of the power of intervention and the obstacles to uniting tend to generate resentments that are easily reusable and manipulable – as we currently see in Europe – by the forces of a radicalised populist right presenting itself as the defender of certain social gains for a limited population. Combative language, through certainly necessary, is not enough to make these resentments subside. To succeed in doing so, it is indispensable to open up broad public spaces to talk about the power of interpretation, of intervention and the power to unite.

It seems quite realistic to characterise the current period as one poised between anger, protest and sometimes rebellion, on the one hand, and feelings of impotence, on the other. Tendencies to the disintegration of societies, the divisions this produces, including at the heart of the subaltern classes, do not favour the perception of what could constitute the common interest among the poorest, those less poor and those who still know a certain stability that they are in risk of losing. The constitution of a new social bloc able to transmit the demand for a political change must, under current conditions, necessarily be very complex. At the same time, the crisis process makes more visible the nature of the conflict and the oligarchy that is pulling the levers, which could encourage a more common vision among the different groups of the population.

The renunciation on the part of governments to exert political power in the face of the growing weight of the financial markets, banks and large shareholders has brought politics and the “political class” into disrepute and caused a withdrawal from the electoral sphere, notably on the part of working class milieu. Added to this is the problem that the political “alternances” in the different European countries have prevented a change away from the prevailing logic to the extent that the social democratic parties in government are equally propound economic “constraints” or, more precisely, neoliberal dogma. The growing insecurity calls for a more determined political intervention, notably on the part of the most weakened populations. In France, the FN is trying to benefit from this situation by trying to make credible a sort of promise of reconquest of sovereignty.

It is certain that it is the duty of the left to oppose at all times and with forcefulness the nationalist

tendencies and hatreds which are developing at the heart of European societies. However, it will be decisive for the future that the alternative left is able not only to contribute to “organising resistance” but also to respond to the call for politics in proposing a real change of policy.

### **Europe: new forms of authoritarianism<sup>61</sup>**

At the moment of the crisis of the neoliberal model and the dramatic impasse in the European construct, the parties of the radical populist right have succeeded in occupying a sometimes considerable political space, shifting the right further to the right. When neoliberal hegemony erodes, when the governments in power opt for super-austerity and the dismantling of democracy, when institutions are increasingly less based on popular sovereignty and political choices on a social contract, a political space opens up that is or can become very advantageous for these parties. They not only benefit from this situation but also become one of its driving engines.

Moreover, in the last four years the management of the crisis at the European level has been accompanied by the establishment of an increasingly authoritarian mode of “governance”. With the “troika”, the “Franco-German couple” revived for the needs of the moment, the emergence of an oligarchy made up of some political and economic decision-makers surpasses traditional forms of lobbying; it is not a matter of legislative or executive powers. In this period, when the crisis can prove to be uncontrollable in the existing political and institutional framework, we are entering into a new period in which we need to be prepared for very different scenarios, both at the country and the European level. The new European “regime of authoritarian stability”,<sup>62</sup> modifying the power structures in order to restrict national decisions, leaves no room for the exercise of popular sovereignty and creates considerable risks for democracy, for the legitimacy of those governing at the national and European levels. The replacement of the Greek and Italian governments “from above” shows the direction taken. One sees that in the enormous arm wrestling in which – in the period of financialised capitalism – economic power is opposed to what remains of political powers in European countries, democracy has lost a lot of terrain in recent years. Within this logic, with the state apparatuses disconnecting themselves from society, “bonapartist” regimes can benefit from these opportunities.

The forms that the dismantling of democracy is taking in the crisis of the present system are not like those which characterised the 1930s. Can we put forward the hypothesis that after more than 30 years of neoliberal offensive, of the individualisation of social relations, the erosion of organisations of the labour movement and the political left, new authoritarian arrangements can rely on the effects of this ideology and of this policy and therefore do not – or at least for now do not – need to have recourse to a terrorist dictatorship nor to mass movements – with the risks that these would entail for the elites – to impose their law? All the more so that social-democracy does not fundamentally oppose the “constraints” of financialised capitalism’s logic, and the radical left at present lacks the forces necessary for imposing another logic. The ruling elites are currently trying to establish, within the framework of existing institutions, a new type of authoritarianism – “post-parliamentary”, “post-democratic” systems – to find a way out of the crisis. The extreme populist right which we are addressing in this article functions as an element of pressure, as a gadfly, but could also represent a strategic potential in the event of a failure of the modes of “governance” now in place.

In this context the Front de Gauche sees as the only practicable strategy that of projecting a large-scale ambition: voting Sarkozy out and at the same time opening up the perspective of another politics – and not only a change of majority (alternative instead of alternance). Only such a perspective of a radical change of perspective can simultaneously introduce actual changes, prevent massive disillusion and in so doing represent a real way of pushing back FN’s offensive.

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<sup>61</sup> The following three paragraphs are taken from an article by Walter Baier / Elsiabeth Gauthier, “Crise, Europe et success de la Droite populiste et extrême”, *Temps modernes* 2012.

<sup>62</sup> In Germany “das neue Regime autoritärer Stabilität”, Hans-Jürgen Urban, in *Europa im Schlepptau der Finanzmärkte* [Europe in the Tow of the Financial Markets], Hamburg 2011.

## Beyond the Extreme Right: The European Populist Challenge<sup>63</sup>

Yannis Stavrakakis

This meeting is about right-wing populism or the populist extreme right. We are, of course, entitled –indeed obliged– to deal with this phenomenon, especially given its pan-European manifestations,<sup>64</sup> about which many other speakers have already contributed illuminating experiences, accounts and theorizations. Clearly, Walter Baier is right when, in one of his recent articles, he points out that the problem should not be approached merely at the national level since it seems to ‘indicate a profound change in the political geography of Europe as an entity’ (Baier 2011: 128; also see Betz 1994, Mudde 2007).

The question is how exactly to conceptually and politically deal with this problem; in particular, is the category of ‘populism’ the most suitable way? If, that is to say, what we are currently facing is the pan-European rise of an extreme, nationalist, xenophobic, exclusionist and, very often, violent extreme right, is the concept of ‘populism’ the proper theoretico-political instrument through which the problem should be perceived, categorized and debated? What are the implications (direct and indirect) of such a naming? And what are the risks for critical analysis and for democratic political strategy?

My hypothesis is that sticking to a restrictive association between ‘populism’ and the extreme right poses certain dangers that have to be seriously taken into account, especially in times of crisis. Indeed, it is not by coincidence that doubts are increasingly voiced both in the theoretical and in the political literature regarding the rationale behind such a strong association. Etienne Balibar is right to point out that today there is a divergence between those theorists and analysts for whom a populist movement is essentially ‘reactionary’ –this is the case not only in the ‘etymological’ sense that he mentions, but also in the political sense, which is equally important in our context– and those theorists

for whom it brings back (even in a mystified, or destructive way) an element of popular contestation of power, and resistance to the ‘de-democratization’ of neo-liberal ‘democracies’, a voice of the voiceless without which politics becomes reduced to the technocratic ‘governance’ of social tensions which are deemed both unavoidable and inessential (since they do not involve *historical alternatives*) (Balibar 2011).

Balibar’s comments do not emerge out of the blue, since this second camp has been gaining in credibility, theoretical sophistication and analytical rigor within the last few years thanks to the innovative approaches to populism initiated by Ernesto Laclau, Margaret Canovan, Jacques Rancière and others (see, for example, Laclau 2005, Canovan 1999, Rancière 2007).

In political discourse, precisely because of the dominance of the association between ‘populism’ and the extreme right in the European context, the shift from a totally ‘negative’ to a more nuanced or even potentially ‘positive’ understanding of populism can take paradoxical forms. To start with a relatively graphic example, the introductory text in a recent Green European Foundation publication on *Populism in Europe* begins with a depiction of populist movements as a force threatening ‘the most fundamental European values’, denying ‘notions of diversity, open-mindedness, critical (self)reflection and tolerance’ (Meijers 2011: 5). Very quickly, however, in the next page, some elements of contextualization and qualification start to emerge: ‘Today, as we have seen, the concept is once again undergoing transformation. The quest in this book is finding out *what populism means today and how to deal with it*. The description mentioned above serves as a starting point’ (Meijers 2011: 6). Likewise, in their own text from the same collective volume, Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Edouard Caudot start by illustrating the current pan-European strengthening of populist parties and movements in very dark colors: ‘An unpleasant wind is blowing over Europe. The air is heavy and for the past few years, black thunderous clouds have been gathering over the continent’ (Cohn-Bendit & Caudot 2011: 15). And yet, their

<sup>63</sup> Lecture presented at the *Transform!* Workshop on ‘NEW POPULISMS AND THE EUROPEAN RIGHT AND FAR RIGHT PARTIES: THE CHALLENGE AND THE PERSPECTIVES FOR THE LEFT’, Casa della Cultura, Milano, 10 March 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Finalizing this paper for publication on 23 April 2012, one day after the first round of the French presidential elections, I can point to the performance of the *Front National* as the most recent and alarming indication of this urgent need.

contribution ends with a positive endorsement of a progressive populism:

What is lacking in the fight against right-wing populism [...] is indeed a competing fantasy, an alternative culture, a discourse which deals with society's frustrations. And, it is clear that since the end of the communist and socialist utopias, the left has never managed to offer a similar alternative. [...] This is the challenge that the Greens and more broadly all progressive forces face, if they truly desire to respond to the threat of right-wing populist tendencies. It is important to use that resentment and its energy, not directing this towards a specific population, but channeling it in a positive way. [...] This obviously requires fundamental reforms, and perhaps even the recognition, to quote Etienne Balibar, of a form of 'positive populism' that can secure the support of many. The project may well be long and undoubtedly complicated; but without it, reviving hope would be difficult (Cohn-Bendit & Caudot 2011: 21-3).

To refer once more to Walter Baier, he has also formulated the challenge for the left in somewhat similar terms: 'undoubtedly the question is complicated for the left. It must oppose the austerity policies of governments, the IMF and European institutions at the same time as it opposes *the populisms which try to exploit them to foment nationalisms*' (Baier 2011: 131, emphasis added).

How can we deal with all these challenges, paradoxes and complications? Far from aspiring to resolve them, I would like to raise a series of points that may help us develop a plausible theoretico-political strategy in the new conditions emerging.

1. Simply put, my fear is that many of our analyses suffer from a certain euro-centrism that reduces the conceptual spectrum covered by the category 'populism' in its global use to a very particular European experience –extreme right-wing xenophobic movements and parties– and then essentializes the resulting association, over-extending the application of this contingent European meaning and elevating it into a universal and trans-historical criterion. It is, perhaps, time to take seriously into account the complexity and historical/political variability of populism(s) as well as its progressive potential, a potential most visibly present in contemporary Latin American experience (see, in this respect, Gratius 2007; Barrett, Chavez & Rodriguez-Garavito 2008; Lievsley & Ludlam 2009; Panizza 2005, 2009).

Indeed, as Ernesto Laclau has put it, populism 'is not a fixed constellation but a series of discursive resources which can be put to very different uses' (Laclau 2005: 176). Citing Yves Surel, he concludes that: 'Against the idea according to which populism would represent a stable and coherent trend typical of the new radical Right, we want to defend the idea that it is less of a political family than a dimension of the discursive and normative register adopted by political actors' (Surel in Laclau 2005: 176). Hence the immense plurality of populist hybrids in the global environment: democratic/anti-democratic, institutional/anti-institutional, refined/vulgar, agonistic/antagonistic, in the streets/in power, top-down/bottom-up, etc.

2. I also think that, falling victims of the aforementioned over-extension, we often use the category 'populism' to describe political forces, actors and discourses in which the role of 'the people' is only secondary or peripheral and where, in many cases, the reference is simply opportunistic. Isn't it a euphemism –obeying a certain type of pro-European political correctness– to use 'populist' to refer to forces that are outright racist, chauvinist or even fascist? What seems to be needed is a willingness to move beyond such undue 'politeness' and apply a rigorous framework for the analysis and evaluation of such political discourses. One crucial test to help us in this exploration is offered by the discursive approach put forward by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Laclau & Mouffe 1985) and further developed by the so-called Essex School (Howarth, Norval & Stavrakakis 2000). Thus, we should always ask where reference to 'the people' is located within a given discourse: does it function as the nodal point, as a central point of reference? Or is it located at the periphery of the discursive structure under examination?<sup>65</sup> If, to refer once more to Baier's previously cited formulation, the aim of

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<sup>65</sup> In general, formal/structural approaches to populism, such as the ones elaborated within the Essex School and partly adopted by Margaret Canovan and other analysts (Stavrakakis 2004) highlight the importance of ascertaining whether a discursive practice which is analyzed is (a) articulated around the nodal point 'the people' or other (non-populist or anti-populist) nodal points and, (b) to what extent the representation of society it offers is predominantly antagonistic, dividing society into two main blocs: the establishment, the power bloc, vs. the underdog, 'the people'.

European right-wing populisms is *'to foment nationalisms'*, then maybe we are dealing with primarily 'nationalist' discourses where references to 'the people' are only peripheral and/or secondary.<sup>66</sup>

In fact, in addition to being of peripheral importance, 'the people' of the extreme right is often of a very particular type that creates considerable distance from the global populist canon. This is because it has to coincide with strongly hierarchical and elitist visions of society. In a recent extensive survey of extreme right-wing discourses in Italy and Germany, Caiani and Della Porta have indeed observed that 'the people' are very often referred to: 'They are defined as suffering from the misdeeds of the elite, and in need of protection by the extreme right itself'. However, the prognosis here 'is not to return the power to the people, but to advocate it to an exclusive (more or less heroic) elite', something often missed in the mainstream euro-centric analyses of populism (Caiani & Della Porta 2011: 197). This clearly points to 'some tensions in the conceptualization of populism when applied to the extreme right' (Caiani & Della Porta 2011: 198).

At best, then, references to 'the people' constitute a secondary moment in the extreme right discursive articulation – but it can also be an opportunistic rhetorical strategy definitely inadequate to provide these movements with a proper name. Ironically, mainstream parties know that already; they are already aware that the extreme right is generally not very serious about 'the people'. This is why, for example, when such extremist forces are needed to form a coalition government, mainstream parties approach them by offering concessions on other aspects of their agenda (usually the xenophobic ones) and not on their alleged populism. This is also why, when such offers are made, extreme right-wing forces are often more than happy to 'betray' their 'people' in the first opportunity.

It is obviously important to note that extreme right parties often manage 'to force their agenda onto other political parties, including the social-democratic parties, but also conquer key positions in terms of government formation' (Baier 2011: 130). But why is it the case that this agenda very rarely includes the populist aspect of their ideology/rhetoric? We have recently witnessed a very revealing example of that process in Greece, with the participation of LAOS –an extreme right populist party– in the formation of the so-called 'national unity' coalition government encouraged by the European Union and the IMF to implement austerity measures (November 2011). As a result, this party gained mainstream status; however, it lost overnight its populist appeal and now struggles to retain its electoral basis. Doesn't that reveal something about the nature of its populism?

3. I just mentioned the implementation of austerity policies in Greece within the context of the European (economic and political) crisis and this brings me to my last and final point.

I think it is obvious –at least from the perspective of certain countries of the European South or the EU periphery like Greece– that the crisis increasingly puts in doubt the central ideological narrative according to which the main struggle is one between a primarily 'good' Europe and a series of 'bad' extreme right-wing populisms. It is indicative of the force of this narrative across the political spectrum that even the call for this workshop starts with the phrase: 'New populisms are haunting Europe'; as we have also seen in the discussion of the collective volume published by the Greens earlier on, populism is primarily depicted as threatening 'the most fundamental European values'. I am very much wondering whether this schema is still capable of capturing the unfolding of political and ideological struggles in times of crisis, especially in the EU periphery. What if, in other words, Europe, and I mean dominant European institutions, have stopped being guided by these European values, values like democracy and popular sovereignty? Here, the ill-fated initiative by ex-prime minister of Greece George Papandreou to hold a referendum, which was instantly and rather brutally suppressed by Merkel, Sarkozy and the EU leadership during the Cannes G-20 summit (3-4 November 2011) is quite revealing, as Jürgen Habermas and Ulrich Beck were quick to point out (see Habermas 2011, Beck 2011).<sup>67</sup> What if, within the framework of what Christopher Lasch has famously phrased as 'the revolt

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<sup>66</sup> It would be a mistake here to take 'nation' and 'people' as merely synonymous or always articulated in the same way. This is most clearly shown in the many instances where political antagonism leads to their ideological articulation in opposite camps or radically transforms their meaning; recent examples include Mélenchon's populism against Le Pen's nationalism (Papadatos 2012), as well as the new inclusive definition of the 'people of Israel' in recent social protests in Israel (Warschawski 2011: 117).

<sup>67</sup> This is the case irrespective of Papandreou's own political motives behind this move.

of the elites and the betrayal of democracy' (Lasch 1995), post-democratic Europe is more than willing to embrace the inclusion of extreme right parties in governments provided they help in the 'dirty job' of pushing through austerity? My fear is that, increasingly, to quote Balibar, instead of being part of the solution, this particular version of 'Europe, as it stands, has become "part of the problem" ' (Balibar 2011).

What complicates things even further, and should be taken into account urgently, is that, at the same time, whoever resists the austerity agenda –especially the left– is discredited and denounced as an *irresponsible populist*. The Greek experience is, once more, illuminating in this respect: without any exaggeration what has lately emerged as the central discursive/ideological cleavage in Greek politics is the opposition between populist and anti-populist tendencies, where the accusation of 'populism' is used to discredit any political forces resisting austerity measures and defending democratic and social rights.<sup>68</sup> What that means is that we should, perhaps, always keep in mind that whenever the term 'populist' is used in a fortuitous way, in a non-rigorous way, associating it with something by definition extremist, racist or even fascist, a collateral damage is taking place: we are indirectly and unwillingly strengthening the ability of dominant discourses to demonize popular resistances to the austerity avalanche.<sup>69</sup>

This strategy of demonization, which is dominating mainstream political and media discourse, does not target 'populism' –and I now mean left-wing populism– by coincidence. It is out there for everyone to see that if the left is to hegemonize the political field at the national and European levels, if it is to attract the middle-class strata currently experiencing a violent spiral of downward social mobility, it can only do so by investing on empty signifiers like 'the people' – it is this potent alternative which is currently demonized. Hence, the task ahead, at least in my view, would be to cautiously welcome the development of a real debate around progressive/positive/inclusive populisms, reclaiming 'the people' from extreme right-wing associations. Very soon, the choreography of the crisis may force the European left, after declaring that 'We are all Greeks' and 'We are all PIIGS',<sup>70</sup> to declare that 'We are all populists'!

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<sup>68</sup> See, in this respect, the presentations and debates during the two-day conference on 'Populism, anti-populism and democracy' organized by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki on 27-8 January 2012: <http://www.anti-pop.gr>

<sup>69</sup> This has also been increasingly the case with mainstream reactions to Mélenchon's appealing discourse in France (see, for example, El País editorial 2012, Buffery & Taylor 2012).

<sup>70</sup> This was the slogan protesting students and researchers used against the visit of German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble at the European University Institute (Florence) on 7 March 2012; details can be found in the website of the protesting students: <http://roarmag.org/2012/03/german-finance-minister-contested-europe-is-not-for-sale/>

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## Why Ever Should the Working Class Vote for the Left?

Mimmo Porcaro

*Except in certain moments in its history, the Italian left has never enjoyed the approval of the majority of the industrial proletariat. It has received, in some cases, the approval of the majority of dependent labour broadly understood, or rather that made up of the industrial proletariat and service workers, in particular in the public services – these workers being on average more skilled than the working class as a whole.*

In the last political elections (compared by Ilvo Diamanti to 1948), even this majority was lost, and the distribution of votes substantially followed the pattern that resulted from the ‘founding’ challenge between Christian Democracy and the Popular Front, being roughly equivalent to the current working class votes for the local PdL and Northern League, precisely in the basins of the old Christian Democracy. Two data stand out among the many illuminating features of the 2008 elections: 1) The greater part of working-class votes that deserted the left did not go to the centre-right formations but became abstentions; 2) in general in Italy skilled workers vote for the left, while those of unskilled workers and youth (above all southern youth) vote right.

At times one tends to think that the aggravation of the crisis could in part remedy this apparent abnormality, but things are not at all that simple because some of the kinds of action the left has developed in recent years tend rather to *reproduce* than to *reduce* the distance between the left itself and the majority of unskilled workers (that is, the workers most exposed to the forms and content of populist communication). There are at least three points of significant distance between what remains of the ‘red’ organisations (those not arising from the more or less liberalist left) and the class that it claims, almost through historical investiture, to represent.

Above all, it is an *altruistic* model of collective action that has been propagated, typical of groups based on civil commitments: a model in which what counts is not the specific *demand for oneself*, but, at least it appears, the generic *demand for others*. It involves undeniable progress in the history of solidary conscience and emancipatory movements, but it is a progress that does not at all concern those who today need immediate answers to equally immediate needs: The new solidarities among popular strata can only be born of struggles that are, in the beginning, inevitably *egotistic*, even corporative.

Secondly, above all in Italy the left has been committed for a long time to the full valorisation of third-sector activity (that is, non-profits and grassroots organisations) as regards welfare. This is absolutely positive when it means the supplementing of a state activity still capable of guaranteeing essential levels of assistance, but it is much less positive if it believes it can substitute the universalistic activity of the state, in Italy’s specific situation, with the occasionality of activities pursued through grassroots associations. A credible mobilisation of the third sector, and of the left that supports it, for defending welfare, should have started from the repudiation of the raising of *subsidiarity* to the level of a *constitutional* principle. Without this repudiation, and rather with the explicit support of the principle of subsidiarity, an unfortunately large part of the third sector ‘gives’ with one hand but ‘takes’ with two, that is it assists solidaristically those who lack their own protection due to the combined effect of subsidiarity and privatisation. The greater part of the elementary needs for assistance still unsatisfied today, continually more severe and widespread, can only find its answer in a large-scale planned intervention of *state* assistance (which is not necessarily synonymous with ‘bureaucratic’).

In the end, all of the left supports with justifiable commitment the battles for free individual choice as regards sexual orientation, family models and life styles, as well as for the respect of ethnic and religious differences. In this case too, what has happened undeniably involves progress either because the ‘cause’ is just in itself or because all this constitutes one of the antidotes to the construction of authoritarian and populist societies (indeed, populism of any type), which have an inexhaustible survival need to stigmatise all behaviour defined as out of step with the goal of developing mass conformism in support of those who are in power at any moment. Unfortunately, however, even in this case unquestionable progress due to left culture translates into a factor of incommunicability with the

most deprived strata of the population (economically and culturally). If, on the one side, the latter indeed fully share the ‘emotional disorder’ that characterises our period, they cannot, on the other hand, push their participation in this disorder to the point of thoroughly questioning – in the name of ‘free individuality’ – family and communitarian structures because the latter simply constitute for them an essential condition of survival and an indispensable form of orientation in the world. This is why there is the coexistence in a large part of Italy’s population of libertinism and family orientation, the cult of a self-styled transgressive television and the cult of saints. It is therefore no surprise that the popular hero par excellence has been Silvio Berlusconi, and no surprise that the left’s political codes appear completely foreign to the ‘people’, if they are calibrated exclusively or mainly on the question of individual rights.

Finally, to sum up all of this, the very struggle for democracy, when it is not presented as the effect of social struggles but as a value in itself, is in danger of increasing the distance to social strata which do not know what to make of freedom of political choice if not accompanied by effects on their own conditions of life.

Who then is right? Those who are more ‘advanced’ and those who are more ‘backward’: the educated section of the working class or the less skilled section?

I would say that at the moment the educated sector is certainly the most advanced on all issues, *except on the essential issue*. By this I mean that if it is true that the fundamental needs are identical for all sections of workers, those of the most educated segment can however benefit from the apparent reimbursement constituted by a whole set of forms of cultural mediation (computer communication, the habit of political mobilisation, the continued creation of agoras), while the unskilled tend to express themselves in radical and absolute, often pre-political ways, which in any case point to the substantial impossibility of being resolved under present circumstances. The desperation of those who have no answers, not even symbolically compensatory, points more clearly to the radicality of the current situation and the need to get out of it with solutions that are, in relation to the last 30 years, completely new: a new and large presence of the democratically controlled state and, as a not remote prospect, a socialist hypothesis in answer to the crisis of capitalism.

Here I obviously cannot deal with the particular contents of these solution nor the means of realising them. I have to limit myself to noting how, for purposes of achieving these goals and returning to being in synch with the largest popular strata it is inevitable that we will in some way have be involved with *populism* – touching it, passing through it, reinterpreting it.

There are, in my opinion, three fundamental definitions of populism:

- The people is a unitary subject, directly endowed with the most important virtues, such as industriousness, honesty and simplicity.
- Every people is defined as such in relation to an *enemy external* to the people itself, and the eventual perversion of a part of the people and its leaders can only depend on the work of division and corruption exercised from without.
- The answer to popular problems can occur only through *breaking the usual institutional and cultural mediations* and through the building of a direct relationship between the people and a *leader* whose principal characteristic is that of being anthropologically homologous with the people.

Given these common features, we can then identify at least three variants of populism: a *reactionary*, *liberalist* and *progressive* populism.

The reactionary variant is based on a strict limitation of the social strata which merit the name ‘people’, from which are excluded all who are ‘different’ and in particular immigrants and subjects who exhibit ‘alternative’ behaviour. In so doing the people are not constituted through experiences of self-education and self-organisation, which were, for example, typical of early Italian socialism, but thanks to the mere belonging to the community and thanks to the continued work of ‘purification’

against an external element. Beyond those who are 'different', the main enemies of this variant of populism are *some* categories of capitalists: in general the banks and speculators, counterposed to 'healthy' productive capitalism, but *with the possibility of shifting the target according to tactical needs*. All capitalists who remain outside this 'selection' – and they are many – are instead part of the people just as much as their workers, thus giving rise to one of the oldest forms of concealing class struggle. The mediations that this populism attacks are essentially the parties, the trade unions and the intellectuals (with the obvious exclusion of the 'popular' party, union and intelligentsia) but above all the mediation of law, for which the direct expression of popular will should essentially be substituted, as interpreted by the *leader*.

While the reactionary variant of populism has been the object of various studies, less attention has been paid to the *liberalist* variant, with the exception of some features of the Tony Blair experience. This variant is characterised first of all by a *fragmentation* and *individualisation* of the people, which seems completely opposed to the communitarianism with which the people is presented in the first variant, but it is really another way of arriving at the same result as communitarianism, that is, the disappearance of class conflict and its political expressions. Actually, understood as a mass of *consumer-citizens*, the people becomes an aggregate of individuals who occasionally choose, without 'ideological prejudices', this or that political solution on the basis of generic and changeable preferences that are not based on the *constant* identification of precise class interests.

What is avoided is the mediation offered by the parties which appeal to stable identities, and what counts here is the more or less direct relationship – or mediated only by opinion polls – of the people with the *executive*. But what is also missing, though in a more subtle way than in the first variant, is the mediation of law, since the deregulation typical of every kind of liberalist perspective provides full scope for a fluctuating of norms in relation to the balance of forces established in the market. Finally, even this populism is not exempt from identifying 'deviant' behaviour to be execrated in building mass conformism: The Monti government, for example, with its maniacal hatred for all workers who still have a memory of struggles and rights, has proclaimed a crusade on behalf of the healthy part of the people, that is, the part that wants nothing other than the full realisation of a (presumed) meritocratic universe, against the 'secure' part of the population, whose members are therefore freeloaders and selfish.

While the first and second variant of populism have in common their concealment of the class struggle, the progressive variant, exemplified by certain features of the Latin American experience, but also by the increasing tendency in the European left to the personalisation of political organisations, is generally characterised by a more precise identification of the adversaries (correctly identified with one or more bloc of various and articulated factions of national and supranational capitalists), and also by the conviction that 'popular virtues' can really only be expressed through processes of self-education and self-organisation. The (present) limit to this position, which moreover never appears in a pure form but as an element accompanying experiences that tend to be socialist, is the low level of institutionalisation and the insufficient autonomy of the popular organisations and therefore their tendency to connect directly to the *leader* and depend on him/her.

It is probably inevitable, also because of the weakening of the unions and the substantial disappearance in Italy of a left worthy of the name, that the conflicts that have already erupted around the capitalist management of the crisis assume a form that tends to be populist. A new and inevitable cycle of anti-capitalist struggles is seeing the entrance of generations of workers who have never been influenced and 'guided' by socialist thinking, who have never known stable unions and credible parties and who nevertheless will have the strength, at least in the beginning, to construct true and proper movements.

Indeed, the *movement*, this form of collective action against which we have been used to measuring ourselves for some time now, has characteristics of continuity, organisational stability, cultural homogeneity and capacity for the public management of long-lasting conflicts, which are only natural for political generations endowed with huge resources of mobilisation and mature democratic habits. All of this tends to disappear today, at one with the disappearance of models of social mediation which constituted both the incubation of the movements and, often, their target. We will probably see

increasingly more of what Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly call ‘conflicts without movement’, that is, explosions of struggle momentarily incapable of depositing sediments of organisation and identity – conflicts that will be increasingly less ‘contained’ and increasingly ‘transgressive’, that is, expressed in unforeseen forms and therefore not tolerated by the establishment, disorganised and *open to the unknown*.

Disorganised conflicts that are open to the unknown require an approach different from those to which we are accustomed. They require ‘forms of order’ which, above all at the beginning, have to collect and give consistency to the struggles *in the same space* in which they are generated, and therefore require a *mutualistic* mode of organisation capable of providing immediate responses, even if partial, to immediate social needs. They require, in order to be known, not only sociological studies conducted from outside but inquests in which the ‘objects’ of the analysis are also the active subjects of the analysis itself. And, finally, they require a *politics* capable of putting forward a strong vision of the future and, for right now, *to break the subaltern alliance* of the educated and skilled sectors of the people with the transnational bourgeoisie (the alliance that still guarantees a foundation for the liberalist left and which is one of the matrices in which populism develops) and to reconstruct *the alliance between the diverse popular sectors*.

Probably the rallying cry that can harvest, translate and transform the populist language in which class conflict is inevitably presented today is that of the recovery of *popular sovereign* and thus of national sovereignty, understood not as a reduction but as an *extension* of the notion of class itself and of class struggle.

I cannot say more now about the complex of motives that make necessary the recovery of the notion of popular and national sovereignty. I will only say that the notion of popular sovereignty makes it possible first of all to extend the notion of class to all those sectors of subaltern workers who, due to the fragmenting of productive units and of types of work or due to cultural tradition, do not think of themselves as members of the class, and that it serves moreover to aggregate to the ‘people’ a great part of those individual and family entrepreneurs who are subaltern to the capitalist market, whose winning over is a decisive task of every class movement. Furthermore, in so far as it alludes not only to a different form of income distribution but to a different kind of state, the notion of popular sovereignty proves capable of concentrating class conflict not only on strictly economic problems but also, and above all, on questions having to do with the *power relations among the classes*, whose lack of solution hinders any serious and stable response to the questions related to the production and distribution of income. Popular and national sovereignty, not as a basis for unrealistic and nationalist closures, which in any case cannot in the end win, but because today the destruction of national space is *the main goal of the class struggle waged by the hegemonic capitalists*, inasmuch as it eliminates the sphere of democratic decision-making potential represented by the nation, substituting it with supranational entities that are openly undemocratic.

Certainly, popular sovereignty and national sovereignty, *alone* and without further specifications, can well be the rallying cry of any populism. However, it should be clear that here popular sovereignty is not synonymous with the dictatorship of the majority, and national sovereignty is not synonymous with nationalism. Actually, I am thinking of popular sovereignty in the terms proposed by Luigi Ferrajoli, that is, as a *negative* concept that indicates that the entity entitled to make democratic decisions can be no other than the people, but this does not mean that this people can decide what it wants, if this would mean, say, infringing on the fundamental rights of other parts of the people; rather the forms of expression of this sovereignty should be subject to the mandates of a *constitution*. The fundamental characteristic of every populism is to consider the people as a uniform totality – while in reality the people is a complex of diverse and contesting groups and interests, such that a true popular sovereignty exists only when every part of the population is placed in a condition to become a majority, and no majority can tamper with fundamental rights. As to national sovereignty, this is not identical to nationalism because, under current geopolitical conditions, it appears mainly as the claim to be allowed freely to decide what the *supranational space* is into which the nation must integrate itself and what should be the political and institutional characteristics of this space.

## Conclusions

### Luciana Castellina

In the course of this seminar we have heard how the adjective ‘populist’ covers many phenomena, often very different ones; and this occurs especially in the more comprehensive right-wing populism, which includes very dissimilar parties: Berlusconi is not Thatcher; Italy is not comparable to Hungary.

What motivated us to come together here is the need to identify the new forms of threat to democracy, which these movements and parties represent; however, I think – in contrast to what many other participants hold – that this threat does not principally take a party form in Italy nor probably elsewhere, either in its populist variant or in the traditional right version. It seems to me that the threat is more serious but different.

The ‘neo’ (neofascist, neo-Nazi) parties have everywhere become little more than folkloric forms, as other participants have pointed out. This is not the form that poses a threat to democracy. In that political tradition and configuration a very extreme ideologisation was to be expected, but today the attraction of ideology has completely disappeared; nor is even the power of a charismatic figure discernible, a figure which presupposes – beyond actual enthusiasm – trust, delegating, and thus prior to this the existence of a collective, of an activist organisation, whereas today the prevailing characteristic of society is an individualism carried to an extreme degree and a deep distrust of delegation. For example, Berlusconi won in Italy, taking the individualist impulse to an extreme level, that is, exactly the contrary of what populist parties do. Even the League is experiencing a decline and, internally, fragmentation.

I believe that the most serious danger lies in the rapid decline of democracy as we have known it; the kind of threat to democracy typical of the global era does not seem to me to be embodied in an actively anti-democratic attitude as much as in forms of widespread annoyance, scepticism and a deep impatience with political rhetoric and procedures, resulting in a clear detachment and distancing from these. This involves processes which have a well-defined objective basis; there is no doubt that politics and its decision-making processes have been downsized; this gives rise to the sense of the irrelevance of politics and the insignificance and inconsistency both of the political class and – even – of the differences between right and left, which in this framework seem to lose their *raison d’être*.

This phenomenon is present in a major way in Italy, both factually and in its theorisation. Increasingly often, for example, we hear talk of a ‘post-parliamentary’ phase of democracy, which is very dangerous because it in fact means the end of democracy. There is a matrix, a model that doubtless applies the concept: the structure of the European Union. In the Treaty of Lisbon there is explicit reference to the strengthening of executive power at the expense of parliament; this executive is not identified with national governments but with the European Commission. The justification used is the following: In the global era, the complexities are such that questions cannot be democratically discussed and decided in instances like parliaments, but can only be evaluated and resolved at higher levels. The Monti government—as Porcaro has rightly pointed out – has pursued and strategically accelerated this post-democratic strategy, and I am convinced that it represents and anticipates a more comprehensive tendency. Beyond the contents of his action, what has profound implications is the way in which it has been read by public opinion; what is more, it involves a still more disquieting model in that it represents what the supporters of ‘politically correct’ identify with, which is the most worrying aspect.

There is an important editorial by Mario Pirani in a recent issue of the daily *La Repubblica*, in which he defends the assertive pragmatism of the Monti government, as an entity removed from the perennial fluctuations and contradictions of Parliament and from its internal and external vetoes, free from the play of parties, autonomous as regards pressures from society, foreign to the long drawn-out, often detrimental and most often inconclusive political dialectic. I am convinced that Pirani is not aware of the seriousness of what he wrote, as I do not think that he can be accused of wanting

to bury democracy and cause a coup d'état. There is a popular equivalent to these elite theories, which is seen in the increasingly widespread feeling that democracy is no longer useful: It costs too much and does not yield anything. Rather than idle well-paid windbag parliamentarians it is better that there be one person who decides; in the event that this single man in command makes debatable and harmful choices, recourse is had to the well-known repertory of corporative revolts, which can also do without the trade unions.

These reactions are not unmotivated; the eclipse of the parties, by now objects of derision, arises from the degeneration of politics and with it of the sovereign state – perceived as empty shells in relation to a *governance* situated elsewhere. The attack on democracy has a long history behind it: The Trilateral Commission in the 1970s, at the beginning of the counteroffensive against rights – explicitly theorised the impossibility for capitalism of tolerating more than a modest amount of democracy, because this social-economic system could not coexist with equality, which is incompatible with competitiveness; in that perspective politics at the most was to operate with processes of delegation and, to come to today, with the implementation of local provisions able to maintain social cohesion with a minimum of force.

We note here a particular paradox: If there has been the propagation of mistrust in politics and the political class, as we mentioned, this sphere is, after all, still the closest and most direct interface for citizens, so much so that Franco Cassano could rightly affirm recently that capital has fed politics to the dogs.

Here a specific reflection is necessary: Capital has achieved hegemony not only because it has emptied out the parliaments and national states, weakening and expropriating them, but also because this tendency has in recent years crossed with a wave of individualism some of whose roots are in a certain part of the culture of 1968, especially in the way in which it has been presented and rethought at the time of the anniversaries: I am referring to that anti-authoritarian culture in which the collective is seen as negative, as 'soviet', as a repressive cage and as such to be shattered, just like parties; from here it is a short step to theorising (and practicing) that projects and desires should transmigrate outside politics.

Politics has been prematurely attacked on the level of civil society, through manifold processes – the massification of culture, the commodification of associative life, the deformation of needs, the subordination of consciousness, the emptying out of institutions, and so on; the political factor has thus been obstructed, which blocks any global and critical interpretation of the present.

There is a left populism that arises from 'good' civil society and from the movements. I would not like to be misunderstood here: I feel positively about the new movements; I am in fact in agreement with the Greek comrade who asserted with his slogan that 'we are all populists', if this means that a characteristic of populism is the readiness to transgress against the logic of the system, but I am not disposed to accept uncritically the culture of these movements, that is, the features of clear populist derivation that I see in them, such as the mistrust of the elites, of politics, of the 'caste', the parties and the institutions and, conversely, the emphasis on direct democracy, 'referendism' and the rejection of any delegated representation. These principles are, it is true, not at all identifiable with those of xenophobia and the right's affirmation of identities, but we find in this kind of left populism – though with obviously different symbols and inspiration – features and slogans which hark back to the populist tradition: for example, the opposition to the dominant elites, the emphasis on 'we are the 99 %', which with its indistinct notion of 'people', makes the class dimension vanish. When I read in the manifesto of the Spanish *indignados* 'No one represents us' and 'we don't want anyone to represent us', I think we are facing a democratic model that if it cannot be called populist, certainly smacks of neo-anarchism.

There are unquestionably understandable reasons for this distrust; if Biorcio cited the data showing the enormous ups and downs in party membership, I would like to recall that in a single year, when the PCI was dissolved (or assassinated), there were a good 800,000 members who were lost in the process. Many of them, if not all, ended in the anti-politics front distrusting parties, with more than a little reason for this coming from their own history. The hasty abandonment of one's own cultural heritage on the part of left parties (above all the PCI) has produced an acute subalternity on the level of ideas, with phenomena like the uncritical craving for the 'new', strategies bereft of any serious theoretical

analysis and even the incapacity to define the ‘common good’, which is not – as we know – the sum of individual goods and their free competition.

I have found many interesting reflections on these issues in an essay in which Christopher Ventura analyses the ten years of the alter-globalist movement, emphasising critically their increasing distancing from traditional organisations – parties and unions – which, along with the claim of overcoming the right-left distinction, is not a healthy development.

I believe that in this dynamic ‘digital populism’ has had a great deal of influence. We often hear an apologia for the net as the realisation of democratic utopia; I believe instead that it stimulates forms of populism or plebiscitarianism, a sacralising of public opinion and a mania for polls. The internet certainly has important aspects, but I think that the form of political culture that underlies it and that rests on it needs to be fought: According to various approaches, in which the theses of Negri, Beck and Castells cross, the new associative grassroots forms that grew around the sharing of the net – in other words, the forums of global civil society – are the new democratic power in a position to make the decisions of monarchic power transparent and accessible to the citizenry. In this way, the virtual communities are said to have created a ‘networked state’ which is the real alternative to a power that does not exist or is not recognised; popular antagonism is said no longer to move with traditional instruments – project, strategy, organisations, hegemony – but to be passing immaterially into the net. Beck recognises in this diagnosis, without mincing words, the new post-democracy, the new post-parliamentary democracy mentioned above.

All of this leads to the question of our responsibility: We have allowed democracy to be impoverished in a dramatic way, to the point of depriving it of any effectiveness such that it seems like an empty liturgy. It will be difficult to climb up the slope again. We will, for example, have to dare to say again that democracy is not the parliament plus the free press plus the parties – that today they are all largely neutralised by decisions taken elsewhere – that democracy is a process based on consciousness and cultural hegemony and not on a combination of formal rules.

In Italy, the greatest accomplishments of democracy and the very building of democratic institutions are not owed to the state but to the parties, which have fulfilled an historical function much more profound and active than in France or England; in the post-war years, after fascism’s excessive state power, when there was nothing left to reconstruct but only to invent, the architects of this process of recreating democracy were the parties; there was no piazza in any city of the peninsula, however small, in which a section of the PCI, the PSI or the DC, a headquarters of the unions, did not open, as places of relearning democracy, collectivity and participation; when Italy’s parties failed nothing was left, in contrast to France or England where the state was still standing. Berlusconi’s ascent can be explained in this way; paradoxically, but not too paradoxically, when the strong parties of the post-war period collapsed the disaster was enormous.

I will end with an assertion that may be irritating or unpopular: In the face of the movements we have to be self-critical unless we want to be taken for detractors of the few and precious social protagonists alive and present in society. I do not intend to abdicate an essential role that the older generations need to play and lay claim to: not that of exalting what they have done in the area of winning rights (there is no dearth of reason to be critical and self-critical on this front) but that of taking care that this experience is transferred to the new generations who want to be engaged. We need to react to the vulgate that only sees in the last century an accumulation of horrors and errors. Is it possible that students are brought – though of course not without reason – to visit Auschwitz and not to visit a place where organised peasants reconquered the earth? This was also part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century!

It is impossible to see clearly into the future if one does not understand what happened in the past; I sense in my generation, and in the next one, the ‘68’ generation, a timidity, a reluctance when it comes to judging the new movements. The horizon of sheer indignation, though necessary, is not sufficient if not linked to a perspective. Agamben has rightly said that archaeology, that is, the critical reflection on the past, and not futurology, is the password to the present, and I agree with him.

The preceding interventions have given me much occasion to reflect on the processes that are gripping our continent and Italy. I was very stimulated by the ways of reading populism offered here; it has been affirmed that there could be a left populism, while, on the other hand, populism has been classically attributed, as a culture and outlook, to the right, in our country and in the world, as far as it connotes a direct relationship between leader and people that skips all the necessary mediations, all the processes of democratic participation to which the left has traditionally referred.

I am convinced that we do not have to read populism from the point of view of the left; if anything, we need strongly to mark the difference that exists between populism and the need for representation, taking the latter as the concept, the frame of reference, that positions us to mark a defining trait of our way of being in relation to others. I am starting from the issue of representation, inasmuch as – for the kind of activity I am involved in, that is, trade-unionism – I and we urgently feel the need to characterise well the very direct way in which the organisation legitimately represents its own members, the workers; how it measures itself and is built, from the workplace through to the leadership groups, the mechanisms and rules of participation and democracy. For the CGIL the issue of representation has and must have the value affinity, of similarity, that is, it must be able to have a sociological connotation not linked to private law, to which we are related if we assimilate and reduce representation to delegation; representation, in the way we think of it and practice it, has to refer to an existential, material, social fact: I represent a widespread need, a common interest, also a shared feeling, and through this representation I construct a social representation.

This being said, I cannot but speak out on what is gripping the workers in Italy and Europe. Other contributions have focused on the overlapping of social and political representation; if I am convinced that in the current phase the latter is experiencing a widespread and pervasive crisis, I have to admit that as a whole social representation is languishing. The problem is therefore to see how to connect these two spheres in order to break with what has occurred in the last years, after the crisis of neoliberalist culture and above all after the reaction with which those who support it are trying to reappropriate powers but also to repress any attempt at protesting or questioning its assumptions, which were already made explicit since the 1970s, as Luciana Castellina pointed out.

This is the issue: In the crisis new powers are being defined, inside the workplace but also within the system of political representation; the scenario of post-democracy has been fittingly evoked. One also thinks of Europe, in which EU activity, within which countries act, passes as inter-governmental action, although in reality it suffices that the two big figures – Merkel and Sarkozy – come to an agreement and all of political life and the choices the EU has to make are conditioned by it. I think it important that April's elections in France can usher in a change that will certainly have impact on the European scenario; of 27 countries that make up the European Union 24 have centre-right governments, and this is an element that is characteristic from 1999 to today, whereas in the preceding 20 years in Europe the majority of governments were centre-left, and it should be noted that neoliberalist *pensée unique* established itself – oddly enough – in that period; the 1980s and 1990s are consequently also the most complicated years for trade-union action, in three areas : the attack on wages, the increase in the intrusion of working time on living time (with the prolonging of working life) and the deregulation of the labour market, made more flexible to promote competitiveness. It is a matter of processes and policies still in force in the EU, even after the 2008 crisis, which have finally led to the recent Fiscal Compact. All of these are choices which prevent European citizens, workers and youth from finding answers to their pressing needs.

In this sense, the role of the union – and of social representation – becomes an urgent question, a major problem to discuss after (and alongside) the crisis of politics. In my view, the role of the union, on a continental level, has been very weak: it has tried to resist, as far as it could, the choices adopted by the European Council

Permit me a digression at this point; I do not agree with the talk about the 'troika' when this

expression is taken to mean the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund. In this way, we forget who is overseeing them, that is, the European Council composed of heads of state and of government (depending on the constitutions of the single member-states), that is, those who have the power to decide who can be part of the European Commission or the ECB and what the bodies are in which the executors actually act; if we stay with simply pointing our finger at the troika, we are committing a serious communicative and analytical error.

The choices that I have mentioned above, up to the Fiscal Compact, have very heavy political and social repercussions not only in Brussels but in the entire European Community. In the face of this capacity for action on the part of European institutions there should have been a response different from the one we tried to give. In the last three years, European trade unions have organised a series of demonstrations; every country mounted national strikes (Greece organised 15 or 16 general strikes, and Spain just as many; Portugal is about to organise one; the CGIL has mounted 6 general strikes in the last three years alone).

Despite this agitational work, to which we should add the French and English examples, we have not been able to bring home any results. There was a time when organising general strikes resulted in governments falling; today this no longer occurs because social action, even action ambitiously planned to achieve important results, is in danger of not finding (and often does not find) any back-up in the sphere of political action.

All of this leads me to say that social action alone is incomplete; if it is not reinforced by political action it is crippled. There has to be a relation between both spheres, albeit with reciprocal autonomy, just as there must be – on the part of the political sphere – a synchronicity, a capacity to pick up the indications coming from the social movements in order to translate them into political choices and legislative provisions, such as to make them into actions that mark the process of change. This relationship has been absent for several years now; in the union we note this lack and see ourselves engaged in bringing it back in the future.

We would very much like for politics to have its proper role again; in particular, those who are with us on the left, also in the union, would like see this connection between political and social action recovered. For this to happen there is need of a project, a vector, a sort of common aspiration, which is missing in this historical period; in its absence, our struggles are not yielding the results we would like. And since what is involved are European processes, trade-union action is in danger of having a merely corrective character rather than one of conflict with the measures decided in European institutions. If corrective action is notorious for generally not producing results, then we have to change the idea with which we want to build a different future.

In this sense, the first task for the left is that of not splitting, neither in Italy nor in Europe; divisions are leading to losses of many gains won in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The regression is tangible; one thinks of the incapacity to react to the Monti government's offensive on pensions: on 12 December 2011 we organised a strike that did not have the participation we expected. That weak response speaks to the weakness of the model to which we want to aspire.

In the general crisis – I repeat – we need to rebuild a political left that is able to have a new relationship with social representation and which takes responsibility for its needs; otherwise, I do not think we have great prospects of winning.

We need everyone to do their part. Italy's political left continues to split in a dramatic way, and this makes it irrelevant; it is outside parliament, both the European and Italian parliaments; moreover, a reform of the electoral system is looming, which intends to continue excluding the left from parliamentary institutions. In the face of this, the left needs to reconnect with the appropriate organised subjects and interests and above all to build a perspective that looks to the future. To this end one thing is urgently necessary: putting back together the pieces of the political left; otherwise, with the present competition between political organisations we are in danger of being without representation. When the leadership groups of these organisations carry on such a ferocious competition among themselves they forget that there can be no results if people do not see them participating in government decision-making processes or in situations in which it is possible to govern the country.

To conclude: From what place can and must politics be launched again? In Italy, as in Europe, from labour; if we assert and practice its centrality, we have a possibility of giving back a specific physiognomy, an identity, an entity to representation. Labour is the element, the frame of reference on which to build for the purpose of opposing and of fighting against neoliberalist policies.

## **Annex**

From *Il Manifesto*, 13 September 2012

### **Karlsruhe's Shortsightedness\***

**Luciana Castellina**

When, right after the Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe gave the green light to the decisions already voted in the Bundestag, the celebrated spread immediately fell, everyone drew a sigh of relief and sang the praises of the smooth functioning of EU institutions. The Court had bowed to the will of parliament, and the German parliament then moved in step with the EP. We cannot blame those who were enthused: If things had gone differently right now there would have been a fine mess.

That is, as long as this enthusiasm is tempered. Or, better, very tempered. First of all because the measures endorsed by the EU and German institutions will in the long run be of little use. Second, because, although the intervention in the decision-making process was somewhat more unanimous and transparent, we cannot forget that the Karlsruhe Court was legitimising decisions which continued to be taken by executives removed from democratic control and thus were bitterly contested. Except that we need to be clear about what is being contested. It is not – as it would sometimes seem – the injury, inflicted in the name of Europe, to national sovereignty, but rather the fact that it is inflicted by a power devoid of democratic legitimation (which also determines the anti-popular contents of the regulations promulgated).

What has still not been achieved, and what by now is not even demanded anymore, is the democratization of the Union, always uncritically accepted as is by some, or rejected by others as irreformable. In both cases, it is never imagined as something that could be constructed differently from the way it was.

It is true that much is written about the democratisation of the Union – always having in mind a nice European Parliament endowed with full powers analogous to those of the elected assemblies of its member-states. Perfect: But the European Parliament can never exercise democratic power if there is no democratic counterpart to it, which means a government that responds to it and to its voters. However, for this to exist there needs to be a common public opinion, and every member of the executive (commissioner or government representative) has to respond to all of the citizens of the Union and not only to his/her compatriots. My point is that if there is not a single unified election district no country can be expected to recognise authority in a representative of another country. As Eric Hobsbawm wrote, everyone recognises, although with gritted teeth, the legitimacy of the government of an opposed political formation on the level of his/her own country, but one is not inclined to do the same if this government is made up of 'foreigners', even though they are EU members.

If this is how things are, and I think they are, this is because the construction of a European society was never seriously faced. Precisely Germany's Constitutional Court, which is a careful and intelligent institution, handed down a judgement of unconstitutionality regarding the Maastricht Treaty, the main pillar of the Union approved at the beginning of the 1990s. The Court did so, according to its verdict, because, since on the European level there are neither parties, nor trade unions, nor organisms expressed by civil society, nor common media, essential for the mediation between citizens and state, there can be no democracy. The Grimm Verdict (from the name of the judge who signed it) was then tempered, and Germany remained a member of the Union despite Maastricht. It is time to come back to the problem: If there is no culture, no common political culture, nor movements, even solidarity is unforeseeable. If it is already difficult within individual countries, imagine how difficult it would be between Finland and Greece!

The problem remains of how to build a European left. The premise is democratic unification, the opposite of authoritarian decisions. And we need to acknowledge that the new movements have been far more European than the institutions.

*\* Karlsruhe is the seat of Germany's Federal Constitutional Court. In 2012 the ECB launched the European Stability Mechanism (ESM). After its approval by the German Bundestag in July 2012, about 35 thousand people of varied origin and diverse political loyalties filed an appeal with the Constitutional Court asking that Germany's participation in the ESM be blocked since Germany would have to contribute a greater share to this fund than other European countries. Among the plaintiffs, who asked that the ESM limit Germany's sovereign power particularly in the use of public funds, was Peter Gauweiler, a conservative Bavarian politician, the party Die LINKE, some academics and the advocacy group Mehr Demokratie ('More Democracy'). At first the Court rejected the appeal, but the question remains open due to other appeals presented. The Court's sentence will be issued in June 2013.*