



## THE POLYGLOT'S SHELF

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### *Towards the sea*

The borders, in **Beyond the old frontiers: the future of the left and Europe**, could be those inside the EEC, because of Giorgio Napolitano's declared stand for European supranational institutions. Yet the old borders, are also and perhaps above all those which have divided the leftist parties in Europe since the October revolution. For the Italian Communist Party, the reasons that brought about the fragmentation of the left are a thing of the past. In Napolitano's book, the idea of one and only European left originates from this awareness.



However, *Oltri i vecchi confini* is not just one more essay on the these general problems, but rather on what Lenin called the soul of Marxism, that is, "the concrete analysis of a concrete situation". In this way, Napolitano departs from the *decisive importance* of the warming in Soviet-US relations, the first signs of which appeared with Mr. Gorbachev's accession to power. The decade 1975-1985 was the one of all turbulences, but the

East-West rapprochement has totally modified the dynamics of international relations. This is not a return to peaceful coexistence such as that which culminated in the Final Act of Helsinki, before sinking into a new period of tension, this in its own way distinct from what has been called the "Cold War". The current warming in relations opens some completely new perspectives, for it is anchored in the fundamental changes taking place in the Soviet Union, and more generally, in what is called the *East*. The process of democratisation in the USSR modifies the data of the international situation: "to verify which actual changes have taken place, and in the future will have to take place in order to guarantee, against regressive tendencies, a total and lasting change in the international politics of the USSR"(p. 66).

The fundamental changes in the East parallel another fundamental change, the one resulting from the creation of "Europe of the Twelve". With regard to this creation, Napolitano stresses on numerous occasions the ineluctability, the

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potential, the stakes and the dangers. In one case and the other, it consists of "grand designs" it being understood that nowhere is it written that teleologically, the success of the "grand designs" is foreordained. They are of value only in as much as is the political will which brings them forth. An even grander design would be rendered possible by the actual success of the first two. It is even a question of the grand design *par excellence*: the disarmament and cooperation among the superpowers (here including a united Europe) should one day create the conditions for the conclusion of the North-South problem, which according to Napolitano, is situated at the heart of "the great risks and common problems of our time".

In passing, one has to underline the accent put by Napolitano on Soviet responsibilities in the crisis of international détente. He speaks of the "disastrous decision to install the SS-20 missiles", of the price to pay for a policy "of extension by all the means in its own sphere of influence". Moreover, he attributes to the failure of this Soviet policy the internal crisis that led to Mr. Gorbachev's accession to supreme responsibility. If one understands Napolitano well, the socialist system has been in crisis for decades, but it was the "active policy" of the USSR on the international scene which made the crisis

manifest and rendered necessary the change at the top. However, it is difficult not to call Napolitano's attention to the fact that Western firmness on the Pershings issue is perhaps not so foreign to the changes at the top in the Soviet Union. In effect, the majority of the PCI, and what is more, certain Social Democratic parties (and not the least of them) refused to support the decision with which the equilibrium was restored in the European theatre on the matter of medium range missiles. But this is no secret from anyone: Napolitano was not the spokesman for pacifism in his own party. And one will note the emphasis he gives in his book to his conviction that the divisions inside the European left on Euromissiles, unilateral disarmament or Spain's entry into the Atlantic pact, belong to the "disputes of the past".

In this way, Napolitano awards a decisive importance to the abandoning by the Soviet Union of the concept of international class struggle, that made practically impossible a consensual approach to the global problems: those, for instance, of the literally explosive gap between the poor and the wealthy countries and of the environment. The concept of interdependence can thus become a properly political concept. In this regard, Napolitano observes that the USSR under Gorbachev is in the midst of transgressing what

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had constituted a veritable taboo in Soviet politics: an integralist conception of sovereignty that led the USSR to refuse any measure of control, in matters of disarmament for example, as well as any participation in world organisations such as the IMF or the World Bank.

The US-Soviet thaw should permit the world to pass from "mutually assured destruction" to "mutually guaranteed security", while advancing along the path towards a "threshold of minimal nuclear dissuasion"—a grand design that has ceased to be merely utopian. Yet Napolitano, although he considers the relations between the two superpowers decisive, fears a return to bipolarism. Certainly, he demonstrates the unrealism of this; but the unrealism of a project never guarantees that one will not attempt to put it into action. From this comes the item at the heart of *Oltre i vecchi confini*: Europe.



Europe must be "autonomous" from the US and "independent" with regard to the USSR. Napolitano does not think a common European defence as a guiding principle, even if he wishes for "better European concertation in the domain of defence". It is a matter of erecting a "European pillar" within NATO. The accent is put on the political unity of Europe and

the democratisation of its institutions, in passage regretting that the Single Act which will go into application is behind the Spinelli Project, which with the support of the left gave a clearer institutional character to European aspirations.

Napolitano worries over the "incontestably major risks" of economic liberalisation and "savage deregulation". He fears the objective of purely quantitative growth, with the ensuing inequalities—a society, as it is said, of the two thirds. In one such Europe, the regional disequilibria would be accentuated, and the North-South problem would be tackled from Mrs. Thatcher's view, according to which the prosperity of the wealthy countries is the motor of development for the poor countries.

Similarly, one should not expect from this Europe of savage competition a positive approach to the problems of the environment. To summarise a bit, a Europe conceived of exclusively as "an economic area without borders" could open up a period of social regression even if this fact would not necessarily be perceptible at the level of average consumption. These are dangers then, indeed, but against which a withdrawal within the national borders would not be a response. Each state would only be more vulnerable to the assaults of world social, economic and financial decision centres. The construc-

tion of Europe is both the playing field and the stake in a confrontation between the forces of progress and of conservatism: "socialism and Europeanism are destined to interweave with one another ever more tightly".

Of course the European left did not come on to the path of a united Europe with one step. Accordingly, the Italian Communist Party passed from "the acceptance of the reality of the Community's construction as a battlefield where to contest its orientations, to an avant-garde role aimed at accelerating and rendering more consequent the developments of the European project" (p. 84). Other important parties are still in the rear, like the Labour Party, in spite of the progresses due to Secretary Kinnock, and like certain Communist parties whose influence has declined yet remains not negligible. Thus there is still more to do in order to ensure a greater cohesion within the European left. Another barrier: the European left must not envision a united Europe as the new institutional framework within which a pure and simple re-launching of the Welfare State could operate on a larger scale.

The type of economic development on which the Welfare State was founded belongs to the past: one must envision a qualitative development stripped of the old in-

dustrialist culture, centred more so around quality of life and individual responsibility than around mere social protection and the growth of consumption. Napolitano does not pronounce the word, but the Berlinguerian concept of *austerità* is not absent from his reflection on which weigh quite heavily three problems whose resolution will require more than one generation: that of employment, that of the environment and the problem of the South, "which from now on translates itself into an internal problem for numerous countries of Western Europe".

One should not deduce that Napolitano underestimates the necessity to defend the social gains of the European workers' movement: he fears "social dumping" and opposes it with "the European social area". However, his insistence on going beyond the Welfare State in the direction of a larger co-responsibility is linked to the idea he has of the social base and of the identity of the European left.

"The forces of the left are called to confront as a fundamental task that of the construction or the reconstruction of a 'safety net', of a system of minimum guarantee for the basic rights that the new groups of excluded can truly exercise. And at the same time, they must know how to gather the energies and the aspirations of the most qualified part of the world of

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labour, of the most dynamic part of the whole society" (p. 113). To hammer in the nail, he repeats: "It would be a fatal error not to rely on the energies of the most qualified part of the world of labour, of the most dynamic part of the entire social body" (p. 23).

Do not miss a word of these quotations. The objective, according to Napolitano, is also one of a society of the two thirds, but the reverse of the conservative project: to unite in the same movement those excluded from the new growth with the most dynamic ones. A vast programme, one will say, but is there any other, if one truly wants serious social reforms? Where to find the point of juncture between two universes that long-term tendencies of capitalism tend to separate? For Napolitano, fully accepted democracy developed according to all the axes of social life and elevated to the level of a goal, of an ideal, could be the place for the creation of a new social bloc under the hegemony of the left: a left that has totally surmounted the opposition between formal democracy and the so-called "proletarian" democracy. Furthermore, this left must renounce "the pretension to prefigure a new, more effective socialist system, not resembling any other". The experience of "real socialism" has strongly shaken both the "functionability" as well as the "desirability" of such a system.

The European left must have its starting point in the individual, in the rights and aspirations of the person. It would be at danger in "underestimating or classing into purely negative categories the structural and cultural mutations on which is based the offensive of the right. On the contrary, one must recognise the multi-directional character of these mutations and comprehend the need for revision which they carry with them, as well as the new possibilities they offer for the pursuit of objectives inspired by the socialist ideal" (p. 119). Such a left, having accepted the primacy of the individual, has not to give in to the conservative offensive against the State, against the idea of the State-as-regulator, the State ensuring the opportunity of living together as harmoniously as possible, as humanely as possible, in strongly differentiated societies.

From the outline sketched above of the social base and of the cultural identity of the European left, one easily will understand that this latter is not perceived or limited to the European parties belonging to the Socialist International, even if the responsibility of these parties, as well as the Italian Communist Party, on the European scale is capital.

The Unions, as well as the "movements" and all the organisations inspired by human rights and by

principles of solidarity, have the vocation of belonging to the European left. In their relations with the multiform social movement and with civil society, the political organisations of the left will always have to verify their degree of credibility and therefore their aptitude to govern.

As for the the fabulous hope for a junction between the reformers of the East and European reformism (namely, the left), Napolitano is prudent. In the best of cases, it is likely that the reforms under way in the USSR and elsewhere will produce their effects in the long term only. This is not a matter of a correction or the perfecting of the system but of a new beginning. The European left can help it, and in any case the reformers of the East are ready to borrow from the heritage of the European workers' movement. Prudence, then, says Napolitano: democracy is still uncertain and immature in the countries of so-called "real socialism".

Having sketched the responsibilities and potentials of the left at the European hour, Napolitano does not avoid the hypothesis of failure. The failure would be a Europe dominated by the lone forces of the market, satellised by the United States and Japan, all the while forming a bloc together with them in order to lay on the back of the Third World its problems of accumulation. It is not in the tem-

perament nor in the convictions of Napolitano to draw out an apocalyptic scenario of a world that the left could not succeed in marking with its own values. Prophecy is not Napolitano's *forte*. In his party, he leaves the easy successes of this to others. He refuses the drastic alternative: either the left becomes hegemonic or it is taken out by the most ferocious of reactions. A large, progressive regrouping is only possible under the condition that it "does not delve into catastrophism, that it does not periodically announce the fatal 'decaying' already under way of the democracy in our country, that it does not devalue the historic conquests and the persistent potentials of democratic systems, and that it does not put in the shadow the fundamental line of cleavage with authoritarian regimes that the recognition of fundamental rights and the guarantee of political, social and cultural pluralism represent" (p. 123-124).

This was worth mentioning. Napolitano nevertheless insists on the excessive sensitivity of politicians to the media and the distance between citizens and the State that risk being created if democracy ceases to be a continuous creation, a movement outside of which it would be limited to the mere administration of what is already in existence—which would lead to negating the system of values on which it was founded.

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All in all, between socialism and apocalypse, there is also room for mediocrity, for what has been called *mediocratisation*. Against this tendency which oozes from every pore of a society where money is king, Napolitano appeals to the socialist ideal, to "pragmatic utopianism".

To conclude, *Oltre i vecchi confini* is the book of a man who has excellent reasons to know why the Communist phenomenon in Europe has not been due to a collective aberration nor to a conspiracy. The roots of this phenomenon in the history of the workers' movement, its historical causes (the Great War, then fascism and the Second World War), its human capital forged in hard battles as well as the prestige it knew how to acquire in the world of culture are not accidents of history. And if there is occasion today to recognise its failure, there is better to do than to deny a past that was what it was and to walk with heads bowed. There is to act in order to make the great social and political forces indispensable to socialism and to democracy exit from the impasse. There is to weave—to reweave—the ties between the diverse composites of the European left.

It is without doubt because the Italian Communist Party was never really a Communist party like the others that a man like Napolitano and certainly others have been able to take on this endeavour. From the Italian tradition, they have acquired historicism, the method of differentiated analysis, the sense of long time and wide horizons. That this brings them back to the bosom of the European left indeed confirms the famous phrase of Jaurès: "It is in descending towards the sea that the river remains faithful to its source".



**Born in Naples in 1925, Giorgio Napolitano was first elected to Italian Parliament in 1953, and in 1981-1986 was President of the PCI Parliamentary Group. Currently serving as head of the Foreign Policy Commission of the PCI, he has been a member of the Italian delegation to the North Atlantic Assembly and of the Jean Monnet Action Committee for Europe since 1984. *Intervista sul PCI* (1975), one of his many works, has been translated in eight West European countries, the United States and Japan.**

Jean Rony