

Harmony and development: a federalistic approach

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1 – Introduction: social economy and social policies

The weakness of a social dimension in building Europe is clearly of a liberal inspiration. The failure of the communist experiences has had the effect of reinforcing this trend. The underlying assumption of such a model is that social cannot do without economy. There can be some positive social fall-out of the economic activity. And in the case of too negative consequences, there will be some corrective social measures to be taken; but always on the margin of the economic logic, which remains the only determining one. The economy thus has been deprived of one dimension – the social dimension – that is quite peculiar to it. With this removal – more academic than political – the real economic and social policies could no longer be oriented by a global project. For some time now, the situation, however, seems to be changing radically: voices are raised everywhere calling again for a political intervention aimed at finding a remedy for the shortcomings of the market and bringing up in the debate the issue of social justice. Also, people speak more and more frequently of the necessity of defining a new way.

If we want to avoid falling again into the mistakes of the past, it can be asserted that the new way shall be one of federalistic inspiration. Federalism aids in understanding the basic cause of this situation: he considers, in fact, a social economy based on a comprehensive vision of the economic and social relations that we have lost more and more today because of this fictitious division of the economic, the political and the social.

2 - Global federalism: a short view

In the light of this introduction, we will try to propose the integral federalism and the social economy as answers to these problems. Contrary to the idea of the State-Providence, that deals with social matters according to an economic logic, limiting itself to correct the negative social effects of the economic activity, integral federalism aims at defining the conditions of a truly social economy, one that integrates at the same time and from the start the objectives of social justice and economic efficiency. It is not the place

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here to present the whole of the federalist economy. However, we can point out its great principles, its lines of force that allow such a social economy to be set up. To start with, social economy must be founded on the human being whose integration into society must be provided for by the social organization itself. It is the functioning of society by itself that must prevent the phenomena of exclusion. We cannot share anymore the assumption that has prevailed for a long time, according to which economic growth alone is sufficient to realize the social integration of all. Such a concept marks the difference between an individualistic orientation of social policies, that is presently the choice of most of the European governments, and the personalistic orientation, suggested by a European integral federalism.

To illustrate the radical changes that such a perspective brings with it, let us give some examples. First, the economic relations, in the enterprises as well as in the economic systems. They can be looked at from the viewpoint of force or in a mutualistic perspective. In the first case, the poles are privileged, neglecting the organization of their relations: inevitably, this results in a system of conflicts and confrontations, a culture of force or of war. It is the case of today's enterprises. The two poles are constituted by the trade unions and employers (labour and capital). It is a confrontation, a power relation, where the strongest wins: in this case the capital.

If, on the contrary, the dialectical organization of the poles is privileged, a mutualistic system is built up, that opens the way to a culture of peace. Conflicts will not disappear for that, but they will be organized in the framework of some regulatory mechanisms. When the dialectical relation between the poles is taken into account, we find compounded in it the service to other people, their choices and voluntary acts, the presence of gift-giving, together with the mercantile exchange, and thus a mutualistic relation, rather than a sterile confrontation based on power relations alone, is privileged.

Another example is about work and working time. The two questions are intimately tied together. Work is not the same for everybody: there is a contradiction in it. On the one hand, a creative activity, and on the other the undistinguished labouring necessary for producing the material goods indispensable for providing for our fundamental needs. We already find this problem in Proudhon: "So, what is [...] the main cause of the multiplication of riches and the ability of the workers? The division [of labour]. What is the main cause of the decadence of the spirit, and [...] of the civilized misery? The division [of labour]". This contradiction will be taken up again, in the frame of the "dichotomy" of work, that is to say, the opposition between creative work and mechanical need. Depending on whether one devotes his time to one or the other of these activities, it takes on a radically different meaning. From the time point of view,

the day itself is “dichotomic”, because it suffers a radical separation between working-time and time dedicated to leisure: “The division of our days into 8 hours of work and 8 hours of amusement is a brutal mockery of creative rhythms. It simply expresses the accidental state of the absurd conflict between two operations which we have lost control of, as we have foolishly ruled them to be autonomous: production and consumption”. And then: the myth of full-employment, the fate of everybody to work for the entire day even if they forecast a slight reduction of working-time... in order for it to be given to everybody. But the liberation of man assumes the opposite: full under-employment; that is to say, a work (meaning a need) reduced to the minimum; the remaining time is not wasted time, but time for society, our own body, the family, for reflecting, for non-mercantile social activities. In short, the era of full-employment is over and must give room to full-activities schemes. With the present rates of annual production growth, it would be already possible in most of Europe to reduce the working week to four days, with no reduction in produced goods. If this does not happen yet, it is because politics and economy have not yet been able to adjust to the deep change of the mode of production.

Spare time has become the new benchmark of civilization. A production becomes efficient to the extent that man is spared the need to take care of the actual production, to the detriment of programming, engineering, controlling and managing information. In this context, the really productive employment becomes the one which raises the average level of education and training in our society.

In a situation where productivity advances can take place with no increase in jobs, and where anyway the most advanced countries cannot compete with the developing countries in mass-production at minimum labour costs, school often becomes the scapegoat on which to blame the intellectual unemployment.

The last example concerns the contradiction we have started from, between political economy and the social approach, between the poles and freedom, justice and equality. First, it must be underlined that equality does not mean equalitarianism. Global Federalism institutes a social of equality by attributing to everybody a Guaranteed Minimum salary, unconditional, that can be accumulated to any other salary, and earmarked to provide for the fundamental needs of every one. This measure radically transforms the power relations between the workers and the employers, and constitutes a possibility to overcome the condition of wage-earner and to lead to the most various forms of association. Thanks to the security it provides, it allows also to greatly exploit the spirit of enterprise and the entrepreneurial abilities.

In the field of labour, global federalism is also innovative. Rather than keeping undifferentiated jobs,

for the simple desire to realize a questionable full-employment, it provides on the contrary to replace, as swiftly as possible, all machine-related jobs with robots. And for preventing the non-compressible part of the "needs" from being charged over a disregarded part of the population, it contemplates that the whole community takes it upon itself, by instituting a Civic Service.

Here are, briefly described, some lines of force that could be of help for realizing really social policies and for defining a common project of social economy for the Europe of the XXI century.

This project requires an explicit political choice. It is based on the shouldering of responsibility and on participation by part of everybody. It obviously implies the intervention of political institutions. But speaking of political institutions, one immediately has in mind a federal organization, in which the principle of subsidiarity guarantees that decisions will be taken as close as possible to the people concerned, allowing their participation in the decision-making process. Such a perspective will allow to stave off the tensions that were aroused in Europe; it allows to take into account the interdependence of the economic problems. A truly social European economy constitutes also a condition for the growth of the political interdependence among the European countries.

Despite Proudhon's hopes, the XX century has not been in Europe the century of the great federations. And that cost two world wars. A hope still survives, based on necessity. Necessity is going to drive in this new direction. But necessity is not sufficient; it must result in a choice, enlightened by all the instruments of knowledge and oriented by a personalist and federalist project. We wish to pay homage here to Alexandre Marc, who has been the main inspirator of this project.