

*International workshop of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation on questions of political and ecological economy (November 30 – December 2, 2012)*

## **Commons and debt: polar opposites in a new paradigm**

by Gianmarco de Pieri

*The aims of the paper are to introduce the new role of the debt, family and state ones, as a general key tool useful for the ruling class to structure the so called austerity political economical european trend, and to highlight the great opportunity of the commons theory to give us the chance to imagine a new way to work over the pincers “private or state- controlled”. Ecological critical theory could provide an helpful toolbox.*

All over the European Union we face a spending review for the welfare state, with the objective to define a new governance model, where monetarism and new liberalism are the milestones and the crisis (and its shock effects) is the context where it happens.

According to Antonio Gramsci, what it is happening under that's grey sky, it is a **subversion from the top** where finance-capitalism is surfing the crisis figuring out a new paradigm from the economical perspective; in the meantime **a technocratic post-democratic is substituting the old way of representation in its without end crisis.**

The shocking encourages that revolution from the top and currently the status of the art of the political system in the EU seems to be under the Carl Schmitt's *state of exception*.

The use of the debt is similar to the one made by IMF in dealing with Argentina in '00; it means less budget for social protection, no more public intervention in economic management, tightly technocratic governance at european level, enlarging the contradiction between society and representation system.

The so called capitalism crisis seems to be followed by few weak growths but where there are in place, we recognized the **hegemony of rentier** and jobless business.

We could opinion not only the system crisis but the **crisis of the growth model** as well.

It appears a new type of human being, a so called *in debt human being* (cit. Lazzarato 2012), introducing a new anthropological type; it looks like a new stage after the Hayek's *homo oeconomicus*.

As per Marx analysis, we are in the *real subsumption* stage and also the exploitation is at *biopolitical* level (cfr. Marx, Negri, Hans Jurgen Krahl); as a consequence exploitation embraces all the life and all the resources moving from what was a right in having a good or service (education, pension, house, ect.) to a new “social intervention” where those goods and service are bought like a leasing.

We can not criticize capitalism only from the “working” side; instead we should assume a large point of critics where, for instance, the ecological issue could be crucial. We could argue, the innovative role of environmental struggle is similar to the one had by the feminism.

On the other hand, debt is not (only) a money issue; it is a firstly a capitalist relationships and as per Marx words it shows us the political role of money and currency.

In the neoclassical theory the environmental resource is not cited. For instance in the Marshall's balance it does not appear.

Later, some theories highlighted that point (Pigou, Georcescu Roegen) and argued some new ways to evaluate the consumption of environmental resources. Refer to the issue of the Pigou's tax for instance, but remember that is a way to adapt the neoclassical economical theory to a new context (the UN conference on climate change seem to pursue that way).

By my opinion, that is a way to bring the environment under the financial dictatorship as happened for the other side of living.

The fiscal compact translates the old european republican constitutions in new ones where **monetarism is the milestone**.

Using other words, we can assume **the fiscal compact and the new public budget rules as the bricks** of a new way -post democratic of course- for building a constitutional framework; those are not a tactical initiatives, but a medium and long term strong strategy for the european constituency from the top.

On the other hand, we note the crisis of the political and social representation where, as an instance, in Italy people have faith in parties and parliament system less then 5% at all according to recent polling. From a helicopter view there is in place a de-democratization process, according to Wendy Brown, where the new point of balance is not achieved.

Within social movements is growing the **commons hegemony** under a olystic perspective (polical, economical, ecological). It emerges from the struggles that **commons are a general convergence point for embracing the change** where **commons enable us to work over the trade off between private way of living and the old socialism paradigm (definitely both are property systems)**.

Neither private nor state: commons, also, and **commonwealth** is the public sphere.

The '70 crisis extended the exploitation to all the life, overcoming the job time. Now all the lifetime and all the sides of living are under the capitalism dictature, that is true for the humang being as well for the ecological sphere.

Therefore, we can not imagine an outside, but all is under a closed *ensemble* where the rules of play are the same.

**The debate about commons is more advanced in the ecological one** where twenty or more years ago some intellectuals and movements have started a discussion around the common goods and wealth of the ecological resource.

For instance, i mention the 2010 huge and successful battle for maintaining water reserves and management as public in Italy; in the meantime the theory has developed some important categorization on law of commons, according to Ugo Mattei (2011)

**Public spaces, new institutions, environmental resources as well as portions of the old welfare state could be thought under the commons theory thinking and reviewed as new claims against the monetarism and post-democratic governance by the social movements.**

Some trends in value creating are supporting this kind of arguing. I cite the mature tendencies of the role of distributed and socialized way of production value in the post-industrial economy; the crucial role of languages -what could be more commons then languages?-, the new professions based on knowledge and the importance of relationships as well the people reproduction.

Those are example of the **biopolitical** categoziation.

From that perspective, it seems that the **battle for copyrighting is a new stage on enclosure the commons, as occurred for land and forest in XVIII century in UK**

Privatizations of the old public managed goods and services are the first track; the other one is the tendency to enclosure knowledge and exploitation environment resources (see the Ilva case history below).

Some people are claiming for a new **cart of forest, like the one obtained in the XIII century**, and highlighting the importance of commons in the **open process for a new european constitution from below.**

Those tendencies and issue could help us in developing theories and practices for imaging and make them real.

## Focus on ecological debt

### **Taranto, the work and the environmental disaster.**

#### **A case study: ILVA steel plant in south Italy**

with the contribution of Alessandro Terra

That part aims at provide key concepts over the importance of the ecological crisis, a crucial side the global crisis. The ecosystem is under exploitation and capitalism use the ecological common resource as a key in value chain building.

Taranto is a town of 200.000 people in the south of Italy, on the Jonic Sea.

In the past Taranto was been the Capital of the Magna Greece and one of the most important city on the Naples kingdom, for the strategical location, in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, after the unification of the Italy became the main harbor of the Italian Navy and in the 1889 was opened the military arsenal.

The economy of the city was based on the fish and mussel cultivation and the farming, but with the Arsenal we can see the first attempt to transform the town in an industrial hub.

In line with the alleged industrial vocation in the 50's the Government decided to build the most important steel hub of the country.

With the policy of the States industry the idea of the Government is to accelerate the development of the South Italy following the pattern of the North.

The agreement about this kind of policy was supported, for several reason, from the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party, so in the 1960, was opened the Italsider, in the 1970 it was doubled.

The Italsider is the biggest steelworks in Europe, it covers an area equal to twice that of the city of Taranto and until the 1995 employs about 30thousand workers.

The steel plant is characterized by the complete cycle of the production, from the mineral to the finished product (pipes and rolled steel) through a series of transforming process highly polluting.

In the same industrial area there are other companies that contributes to the pollution of the air, the sea and the farm of the country, in fact there are: the oil refinery, a cement factory, the navy arsenal, 3 landfill of special wastes and a waste incineration plant.

For these reasons Taranto was recognized as a high environmental risk area by the World Health Organization in 1986, and by the Italian Ministry of Environment in 1991.

In the 1995 the Riva Group buy the State company at a very low price and start the downsizing of the workforce, the workers nowadays are around 12.000 and 5.000 of induced activity, despite the number of employees so high, in the territory of Taranto, the unemployment rate is around the 30% according to the average of southern Italy.

On July 26 a judge ordered the closure of ILVA's key production sections, in practice blocking the entire production process, in addition, eight executives of the Riva Group have been placed under house arrest. Among them are the head of the group, Emilio Riva, and his son Nicola.

They are accused of culpable and intentional disaster, an intentional lack of precautions against industrial accidents, poisoning of food substances, aggravated damage against public goods, air pollution, dumping of dangerous substances and corruption.

During these years ILVA produced the 90% of the dioxine of the entire Italy, 8.8% of the total dioxins emitted in Europe, over and above a mix of minerals and metals, inhabitants of Taranto inhale 2.7 tons of carbon monoxide and 58 tons of carbon dioxide every year, the cancer death rate in the area is 15% above the national average and lung cancer deaths at 30% higher.

There isn't a family in Taranto without a sick or dead member thanks to ILVA, farmers were put out of business when grazing was banned within 20km, the animals can't be butchered and dispose as a toxic waste, the dioxine entered in the food chain, in the breastmilk.

However the ILVA produces the 75% of the entire GDP of the province. In Taranto, the people's only choice is between work at the factory, unemployment, emigration or death.

On August 2, two demonstration have crossed the city, one led by the three major Italian unions CGIL, CISL, and UIL which called the strike, and the other by social movements; the first asked for the sequestration to be revoked and for the reopening of the plant, the second one asked for a social justice, without the blackmail between health/ environment and work, this demo sponsored by the "Committee of the citizens and workers" interrupted the speech of the Unions and has taken word to say that they are not represented by unions and parties.

Political and union representation is in crisis because they have always defended the production and profit and never the citizens and workers issues, because they have defended an humbling work and prevented from living dignified lives.

In the next weeks of August the Committee have disputed the environment minister Corrado Clini and sponsored a lot of public meetings in the neighborhoods of the town, especially in Tamburi, the nearest one to the steel plant.

A lot of people attended to the mobilizations of the Committee and now they're working on the knowledge needs to start to build a different city from below.

The policy program based on the needs of an environmental justice, right to health, a basic income to protect citizens from poverty and a sustainable development, free from the blackmail of the work of that factory of death.

This struggle talk about democracy, the real one, from below, the only one able to protect the common goods, this struggle is inspired by other similar struggles like the NO TAV and the movements against the landfill in Campania.

There is a common line which crosses from the movements that defend themselves and their territories from the land grabbing, the idea born in the Seattle movements that a best world is possible, right now necessary.