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Italy - Dossier

A parliament of just “giving the green light” is not a normal parliament

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It will take a long time to think over this vote in Parliament about the military missions. We will have to think about it later, but also in the coming hours, as the very delicate question of the vote in the Senate approaches.

At present, everyone's attention is concentrated on the role of the "dissidents" and on the risk of the government falling. This risk has only been avoided because the "objector" senators have chosen to agree, in an act of extreme sacrifice, to vote for the motion of confidence in the government, without however being any less in disagreement on the fundamental issue. This is a choice that the present conditions have rendered "obligatory" and which is therefore from this point of view inevitable. But the way that it takes on the form of an ultimatum is also inevitable: one can only express a vote of confidence on the war once. And never again.

But - over and above broader political choices, which also deserve to be thoroughly thought about, and which, if our newspaper agrees, I propose to come back to - it is worth asking ourselves some questions about the political situation that emerges from the vote in the Chamber. What is this parliament in which the "No" to the war only gets four votes against 549, in other words, a majority worthy of national unity? So what is this foreign policy which wins such overwhelming agreement? Why should a deputy have to put his conscience in contradiction with his vote? How should we describe these institutions in which the highest responsibilities are put in question as a result of events and only depend on the pressures exerted by parties and coalitions on individuals who are threatened with being excluded from "political status"?

Italian policy concerning Afghanistan has given the impression of being literally dead. We could have had a debate about fundamental issues, we chose to chatter about formulas: about enlargement and self-sufficiency, about broad agreements and about the degree of the "anachronism" of parties and their component parts. Whereas we should all have been preoccupied by the horror of the civilian victims, the bombs, the blood spilt, the main preoccupation seemed to be on the contrary to "mark" the dissidents, to intimidate them, to politically isolate them.

The dissidents were described as "bleeding hearts", even within the pacifist movement. Those who said that have forgotten that this insult has always been hurled, to demean the struggle for peace, to reduce it to a question of "conscience" and to deny that it can be, as it is for us, the keystone of our political commitment and of our perspective of changing society. Those who oppose have been declared guilty of "variable majorities", as if the measures that were put to the vote should not take account of the consensus within the majority.

A perverse form of the "grand coalition" appeared in the Chamber, but no one felt offended. The uniformity of the green lights which invaded the entire hemicycle did not provoke a scandal. On the contrary, the few red lights that timidly shone, which represented all those who rose up "without any ifs or buts" against the war and who are much more numerous, provoked a scandal. It was a demonstration of what it costs to defend your commitment right to the end, including at the risk of disapproval from your own party.

Perhaps Revelli [1] was right to say that state policies are impermeable to the policies of movements and of non-violence. But that does not make it right to deduce that whoever expresses disagreement is playing "the three-card trick" [2] or even aiming only to increase their visibility to the detriment of their party. That is a summary judgment which doesn't go with this non-violent culture which those who developed it want to take forward. Is disagreement only legitimate if you hide it, take it "somewhere else" and does it cease to be when it disturbs routine and shows that uniformity is not the only rule?

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It is this disavowal, in this Chamber and in this Senate, in the present political situation, which is the real "anomaly of the system", the non accidental fruit of the great lesson produced by the PRC, which was always the interpreter of such anomalies. As it is also the fruit of the lessons of the past, of the noblest former dissidents, who have left us a vibrant example, such as Ingrao. [3] We do not see any contradiction between his refusal of the Gulf War of the 1990s and our "No" today: because there is a continuity between these two facts, and it is not true that the question of Afghanistan is particular or minor. Like the case of Kosovo, it represents on the contrary the emblem of the "humanitarian" and multilateral war which constitutes the guiding light of Europe's foreign policy.

Not to contest it fundamentally is to become an accomplice, not only to what is happening in Kabul, but also to a dynamic of an international policy that can lead to fresh disasters. Let us take the hypothesis of a multinational contingent in Lebanon: that is likely to lead to another political tragedy, because behind this proposition there hides a new enlargement of the tasks of NATO (transformed into a "new UN" for only the Western capitalist hemisphere of the planet) and a proposal to support the State of Israel which, for what happened in Lebanon, should have to answer to the International Court of Justice.

This proposal, which is likely to be presented as a "contribution to peace", will on the contrary - as all, really all, Western military missions demonstrate - be the cause of a tragic situation. Whereas there exists a political solution capable of unblocking the situation: the creation of a real Palestinian state.

In my opinion, our opposition has been necessary because it concerns a nerve centre of politics, what remains its defining element, the perspective of peace as opposed to the noise of war. By so doing have we become the only repositories of pacifism? Those who say that know that they are talking nonsense, because pacifism is complex, both the pacifism of the movement and the pacifism that is present in the institutions of state. We are only a part of it, we are conscious of that; we do not pretend to represent all of it.

That is why we will continue to debate with everyone, inside and outside of the institutions of state, to start up a new unitary dynamic. There was a very exceptional assembly on July 15. Another one, useful and important, took place in Genoa on July 22. We talked, we confronted one another, we fixed a new meeting date in September. I do not think that our behaviour in Parliament handicapped this forward march, on the contrary - forgive me for being presumptuous - I believe that it helped and stimulated it.

Disagreement always shakes up things and people. That is why I regret having been taken as a target, sometimes also by the Left, and having been accused of seeking to valorise myself and to acquire a political substance that I lack. And having been insulted from the upper layers of the party, who are often seen as arrogant and deaf.

Because the fundamental question remains: is an entirely homogenous Parliament more normal or is it worth more for all of us that some red lights that continue to shine?

[1] Marco Revelli teaches philosophy in Turin. He published in 2003 *La politica perduta* (Lost Politics).

[2] A trick that is done with three playing cards which consists of substituting the card that the person betting has to indicate.

[3] Pietro Ingrao, who took part in the Resistance and was a historic leader of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), took part in 1991 in the creation of the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS), which has today become the Left Democrats (DS). He broke with the PDS over the first Gulf War and joined the PRC in 2004.