

Fernando Bruno's essay gives an account of the political life of Giuseppe Dossetti and of the harsh confrontation between his faction within *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) and the party's majority, led by Alcide De Gasperi. Dossetti and his group brought into the Italian catholic political environment a new sense of what its mission was: not to perpetuate the forms in which power was managed in the XIX century's liberal parliamentary regime, but to educate the masses to participate in the political life and to transpose their needs into a holistic political programme. In other words, to turn the catholic political movement from a group of mandarins into a modern mass party with a well-defined political identity. It seems to us that this assumption inspired all the battles fought by the Dossetti-group, within DC as well as in the *Cronache Sociali* journal. The battle for the primacy of the party's managing organs over the parliamentary group stemmed precisely from the will to avoid the risk that the implementation of

the party's reform programme might be undermined by impromptu, opportunistic agreements with other groups in Parliament, in defence of vested interests. The battle for the Government's policy meant not just criticising fiscal austerity and credit restriction: opposing Einaudi's economic policy primarily meant reaffirming the principle according to which no choice in the field of economic policy has a purely technical value, because it implies the decision to side with either one part or another in the distributive conflict. Hence, Dossetti's focus on the primacy of politics over non-elected bodies: now as then, the question is whether the role of the State is that of preserving the spontaneous market order, possibly legitimised by hypocritically resorting to the principle of neutrality, or that of actively addressing inequalities. And still, Dossetti's fight against the hegemony of free-market ideology is not parallel to his political engagement, but a crucial part of it: by projecting the ideal of a reform of society on Christian

bases, he deeply transformed the meaning of the political programme, from that of a bargaining chip (a contract with voters, if you wish), to a manifesto of a fairer society. This reminds us that persuading voters on the eve of an election is something profoundly different from building a consensus. Nowadays' discontent of masses with politics probably stems from the inability of political parties to project political identities, alternative to one another. "Going beyond the XX Century" has been a very successful slogan, but what if it legitimised a new consensus of all political parties on a platform of Victorian economic and social policies, sold thanks to the most modern political marketing strategies? If politicians wish to rebuild their relation with citizens, what they need is not to cut MPs salaries, but to say loud and clear where they stand.

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BRUNO

DOSSETTI'S LEGACY: THE STATE SHALL NOT BE NEUTRAL

“Economic development and cultural advancement can only occur when income and purchasing power start rising once again. Inspired and effective policies must focus on the needs of the poor, as La Pira said, otherwise, quoting Rampini, austerity and neo-liberalism will sink together.”

Telos: In nearly any account of the history of the Italian Republic, the Christian-Democrat Party (DC) plays the part of a culprit. In your book devoted to Giuseppe Dossetti, you did not only reconstruct the story of a politician and his faction, but you appear to depict that story as an unfulfilled promise of a party, and of a country, that never came to light. Was Dossetti the prophet of a different DC and a different Italian society?

Fernando Bruno: No doubt, Dossetti was the forerunner of a different Christian-Democrat party and a different Italian society. His young age and his cultural upbringing had a decisive impact on his political positions. Think of his views on Fascism. Like Gobetti and Gramsci, Dossetti rejected the interpretation prevailing in his party, influenced by Benedetto Croce, according to which Fascism was a rupture in the history of modern Europe; instead, he thought that Fascism was the inevitable authoritarian development of the political systems that were in place in the late XIX century. Hence, his absolutely original reflection on the need to lay the foundations of a brand new pact between the State and the citizens after the war, and to keep the two issues of security and social justice combined when laying down the rules of democracy - a true heresy in DC at that time. Hence, again, his heterodox view that the new democracy should be built on the values that had inspired the Resistance movement, and his consequent proposal for a strategic alliance between the mass political parties, the heirs of the Resistance. So, the question is not whether Dossetti was the prophet of a different DC and a different Italian society or not, but whether or not, and to what extent, the ideas of Dossetti - an innovator and a forerunner at the same time - had any chance to be put in practice in the political context of those years (1945-1952 - *editor's note*). In other terms, we should ask ourselves if his ideas could serve as the basis of a realistic political project. This could hardly be the case, given the influence of foreign powers, the beginning of the Cold War, the interference of the Vatican hierarchies, the predominance of a conservative economic doctrine and its influence on the Government's economic policy choices. But we are left with an extraordinarily rich legacy of thought, intuitions from which we can still draw inspiration and, above all, an authentic civic passion we are desperately lacking these days.

The criticism raised by the Dossetti group of the conservative policies pursued by Corbino and Einaudi, which they saw as intended in defence of vested interests, is extraordinarily up-to-date. However, nowadays very few would publicly question the prevailing view that deflationary austerity policies, and those technocrats speaking in their defence are neutral with respect to the distributive conflict. Would you say that the legacy of Dossetti, La Pira and Federico Caffè has been completely forgotten?

Dossetti's proposals in the field of economic policy were all but neutral, and so was the reaction they raised. Dossetti and his group harshly criticised the deflationary policy, directly inspired by Einaudi and



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the fiscal austerity pursued by Pella, rigidly focused on the defence of a balanced budget and the value of the currency, on the grounds that they were intended to protect rents at the expense of wages and savings, and they ended up penalising businesses and profits as well, by generating a credit crunch. The Dossetti group advocated for a radically different economic policy, based on public spending and investments to foster domestic consumption and tackle the widespread poverty. As the economist Federico Caffè wrote on *Cronache Sociali* in July 1949, even a non-ambitious goal such as that of using public spending as a counter-cyclical policy became unachievable if economic policy discretion were to be sacrificed in the name of a balanced budget. Instead, Caffè argued that “*it would sometimes be a better strategy to run a deficit, rather than balancing the budget.*” In my view, this lesson is still absolutely valid and it is being rediscovered. As Federico Rampini recently wrote in his book “*The Austerity trap*,” the timid economic recovery in the U.S. shows that Governments need to abandon the neo-liberal doctrine if they want to start fixing society after the debris of the last years. This is more or less the same view expressed by Joseph Stiglitz (*The price of inequality*, 2012) and Jeffrey David Sachs (*The price of civilisation*, 2011). Even a conservative politician as Merkel has discovered that markets are no friends of the people, while the think-tank of British Conservatives recently raised criticism of the *bastard capitalism* of our age. In other terms, the global economic crisis has led even the conservative front to rediscover the idea that markets shall adapt to democracy, not the other way round. Against this backdrop, the views once held by Dossetti and his group on economic policy appear to be popular once again, although in new shape, despite the technocrats’ fervor for monetary orthodoxy.

Dossetti had a very clear view of how a modern mass political party should look like: strong focus on building a consensus on how to reform society, no room for mandarins, parliamentary manoeuvres, charismatic leadership. It was a rather innovative view, in an archaic country; but again, has his lesson been completely forgotten?

It was indeed a breakthrough innovation, compared to the XIX century model that De Gasperi had in mind. Dossetti proposed a profoundly innovative model of political party, not just a coalition of heterogeneous forces, united in defence of corporative interests, but an entity able to cement a consensus in the society. He refused the idea that parties should be electoral blocs, he rejected the view that the parliamentary group should prevail over the party’s organs and that individual prominent figures should have a leading role. He thought that a party should be characterised exclusively by its agenda, and should exclusively split on matters related to its agenda. He thought that personal trust should have no role in politics, and that political parties should be run according to the principle of collegiality. In times where populisms are spreading, and charismatic leaders emerge thanks to media marketing strategies, we should certainly keep in mind the principles that inspired Dossetti’s action.

You have highlighted that the vision of the *Cronache Sociali* group was permeated by the view that the liberal civilisation and its institutions were undergoing their terminal crisis. Can this vision inspire those who are now advocating for a reform of the State nowadays?

Obviously, the historical and geopolitical context has radically changed, including global economy, habits, and technology. So, the views advanced by the Dossetti group cannot be simply transposed into the present context, and cannot provide us with any easy solution. However, the crisis we are living is an enduring one. Europe appears to be an aged and weakened continent. The notion itself of Europe is outdated and insufficient. Its perception as a shared identity, gathering the citizens of a whole continent together, is absolutely inadequate. Its institutions are old. The model of building European integration on budget equilibrium and monetary policies has proven ineffective, although it has not been abandoned yet. This is indeed a sign of a deep crisis of our liberal society. If we want to safeguard and keep on promoting representative democracy, which was created 2 centuries ago in this part of the world, Dossetti’s legacy can give a contribution to understanding the reasons of the crisis and devising solutions. Of one thing I am sure: a civilisation can only flourish, once the overwhelming majority of its population has satisfied its essential needs, in terms of wealth, health, education. Only a new welfare can make Europe flourish once again. Economic development and cultural advancement can only occur when income and purchasing power start rising once again. Inspired and effective policies must focus on the needs of the poor, as La Pira said, otherwise, quoting Rampini, “*austerity and neo-liberalism will sink together.*”