Chapter 61
Changes in the Political Culture of Italian Younger Politicians

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, Italy has gone through some deep changes in the political sphere. The fall of the Berlin Wall had forced political parties from opposite sides to re-organize themselves: their targets, ideologies and projects. At the same time, these historical events have been shortly followed by a major national bribe scandal that invested the main political leaders who had governed the Country for half a century. As a result, the last turn of the past Millennium has left a strongly politicized Country with no acknowledged leaders, no clear ideologies, no traditional, recognizable parties. It is in those years that Berlusconi's new venture gained votes and success. The fracture between political organizations, leaders and citizens though, became unhealable. The younger generations seemed to be the ones who suffered the most from political apathy or, worse, distrust. So we wanted to investigate who were the young politicians who, in these times of crises, had chosen politics as an important part of their lives. We have carried out two different surveys in different years and we found that political parties were changing deeply and radically. That their role in the political socialization of young political actors had become very thin. That candidates began to be chosen amongst the affluent few or, at least, amongst those whose personal fame and social/professional/family network would guarantee their party at least a dowry of votes that could make the difference in times of elections. But this method would not guarantee cohesion nor government stability.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary political sociology many authors agree that there is a strong correlation between the arising of a political generation and epochal events that have the effect of a historical and social imprinting on those who experience them and especially on the younger generation. In this sense we can speak of a political generation that contributes to the formation of a new political culture. For the German Sociologist Karl Mannheim (1974) a generational bond is one that goes beyond simple affin-

ity of location (the fact of being born and having lived in a particular historical period and in a specific geo-political environment) introducing a further implication to the concept: the fact that a generation cohort participates to common destinies. As it is known, for him a generation could be defined in terms of "collective response to a traumatic event or catastrophe that united particular cohort of individuals into a self-conscious age stratum". And Bettin Lattes (1999, 2001), has stressed that a generational bond mainly implies the possibility that subjects belonging to the same generational cohort consciously and responsibly participate to the problems of their times.

If we look at Italian political generations through the decades we notice a growing process of individualization which limits traditional public and political experiences. According to the largest Italian report on the condition of the younger generations (Buzzi C., Cavalli A., De Lillo A., 2007), these tend to interpret reality in an individualistic manner, with a restricted view on society, seem growingly detached from idealistic motivations and certainly less interested in politics than their predecessors. At a first sight their choices and life-styles could be read as utilitarian but need to be interpreted in the light of the historical times their living. For instance they could be one of the outcome of an effort of adaptation to the complexity surrounding them. It is the first generation having to adapt to "second modernity" and the globalization era. A rapidly changing world that made Bauman poignantly define "liquid" (Z. Bauman, 2000), facing which, younger generations do not always react ducking to the private sphere but also starting what we may call "new political modalities", in search for alternative spaces and places in order to give their contribution to collective decisions (see also Montanari A., Bova V., 2005 and Ferrari Occhionero, M., 1999). The political sphere is no longer just the traditional one that goes along the lines of participation through political parties or trade unions, but is enlarged to participation to the public sphere and decision making through associations, volunteering, public debate and organization of petitions and demonstrations through the internet for example, and the Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). This kind of participation can and often is unframed by traditional political ideologies or even common homogeneous projects. It can be activated individually, outside organization agencies, it can reunite people from all over the world who have never met (and never will), who vote may be very different parties in their respective national elections, but who share a common interest on one single issue upon which collaboration takes place in awakening public opinion, signing petitions, and so on. Their activism can last until the goal is achieved (or until it becomes evident that it will never be achieved) or it can be "one shot". Besides these general trends allowed by information technology progresses, in Italy and indeed in other European Countries, other factors have contributed to the fragmentation and individualization of younger generations activism.

The Berlin Wall crack back in 1989 had already destabilized traditional parties, leaders and consolidated ideologies. It did not only affect Communist Parties in Europe and Italy, it also forced their old opponents to rearrange their ideologies, slogans and campaigns. Since the old enemy (and the risks envisaged in connection with it) was won now much of the content of their communication and action had to be rethought. As if this major change in the political sphere was not enough, Italy had to face another major challenge. Soon after the Berlin Wall crack, in 1992 a major bribe scandal under the name of Tangentopoli exploded, swiping away the main parties that had governed the Country for 50 years. Former prime ministers, party leaders and members of the government and parliament either ended in jail or were under investigation accused of bribery when not of theft and other administrative illicit behaviours. It was the dawn of a political era that had lasted since the end of the Second World War.

In this context it is no wonder that younger generations have developed a detachment from politics: no clear ideology and coherent projects to identify with, no recognized reliable leaders. Furthermore,

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