



Open letter to the institutional and political leaders– No. 3

Leaders' action or the alliance of intermediate bodies to renovate democratic systems?

In summer 2016, as every year, the world's elite gathered in Davos, Switzerland, for the World Economic Forum, which showed a significant discontinuity compared with previous editions. Instead of trying to propose forced globalization as an advantage for everyone, as it had done in the past, they chose to tell the truth: the assertive technological innovation and, in particular, artificial intelligence, will not benefit everyone, but it will lead to an unemployment rate never seen before and possibly irreversible. The first solutions suggested by the founder of Microsoft Bill Gates (to tax robots) and by Klaus Schwab, the organizer of the Forum (universal basic income) show that the fears of those in power regarding social and political consequences of such a reality are high.

In view of this situation, there is a political class which is widely delegitimized throughout the Western world for various reasons, including not being able to avoid the financial drift of the economy which has caused severe losses to taxpayers and, with the “bail in” system adopted in Europe, even for the holders of bank accounts, whose deposits should, instead, be thoroughly protected.

Therefore, the challenge consists in overcoming the oligarchical model existent in all Western countries, except Switzerland, and make room for the actual will of citizens by introducing substantial elements of direct democracy or by improving the representative ones. Only in this way it will be possible to make difficult future decisions in tune with the will of the majority, avoiding popular uprisings.

France is the only country where a significant debate on these themes is taking place, also at the institutional and political leaders' level: President Hollande has proposed the introduction of the referendum based on popular initiative, which is at the heart of the Swiss democracy and allows citizens not only to propose new laws but also to have the last word on their approval. Some party leaders or politicians have, instead, taken into consideration the draw, which had been proposed several times in the past by Segolene Royale, raising strong oppositions and some derision. When,

in June 2016, the former Minister of Economy Montebourg suggested the draw for the choice of senators, he did not cause hilarity, but emulation: in October, in fact, Macron put forward the idea of drawing a jury of citizens for the control of the president's actions, and then there was Melenchon's proposal of establishing a Constituent Assembly to surpass the Fifth Republic.

This proposal contains an important methodological innovation described in its party's Programme, which consists in leaving the citizens free to decide whether to vote for a delegate for this assembly or have part of its members drawn. This is what the programme states: "in order to determine the part to be elected and the one to be drawn, the wisest (and most democratic) method is to leave the decision to popular sovereignty. On the election day, every citizen will be able to choose whether to vote for some candidates (each electoral roll will obtain a number of seats proportional to the number of votes received) or express their preference through a draw (if X% of voters choose the draw, X% of seats will be drawn)".

The debate on this innovation has led to the suggestion of drawing not among the components of the entire electoral roll, but only among those who have opted for the draw. This last formulation is very close to ours (see the document ID "Proposals to develop democratic processes"), as it foresees having within an assembly both professional politicians and citizens drawn among those who stand for election. It differs from ours as we believe it is possible to lay down some admission requirements which are useful to allow a discussion on an equal footing among the members of the assembly.

Finally, the President of the young members of the Front National, Gaetan Dussausaye, expressed his admiration for Aristotle and Rousseau, defenders respectively of the draw and of direct democracy.

We shall see whether, after the presidential elections in France, the above mentioned proposals and attitudes will have a follow up.

Generally speaking, we believe that a significant contribution to encourage democratic reform could be made, in those countries interested in the project, by those intermediate bodies which, despite not having political functions in the strict sense, "are on the citizens' side" (eg. unions, active citizens' networks, consumer associations, environmentalist forces), and who would benefit from institutional reform which would make more space for effective popular will, in terms of their own objectives.

It is our intention to contact, in some countries, the Organizations interested in democratic development, so as to launch a collaboration aiming at involving the intermediate bodies of society into the International Sortition Project. We will also verify the interest of some political institutions and forces in promoting a simultaneous trial of the project in different nations.