

Dialogue on debts

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LEMBO TICINESE.

Sembrava un enorme ferro di cavallo arroventato, gettato là sulle falde del monte Boglia. E pareva volesse abbracciare tutto il monte, nella cupa notte. Ardeva, si spingeva sempre più in su, indomabile, irrequieto. . . . Uno dei soliti incendi di montagna che impressionano così tanto e che fanno restar estatici, ad ammirarli. . . . frutto solito di solite imprudenze, meglio, di solite sbadataggini di contadini o viandanti che gettano via il mozzicone del loro sigaro, senza pensare che all'improvviso, in un baleno, quel loro innocente mezzo di una placida fumatina, può tramutarsi in spaventevole incendio. . . . All'alba più nulla. Solo chiazze rossastre, qua e là, cenere. . . . odor penetrante di bruciaticcio. Mentre, placida, la cittadina dormiva, indisturbata, arditi esperti domavano, nelle tenebre rotte da bagliori sinistri, il fuoco — aiutati da bravi terrieri — lo domavano così come san far loro, alimentando altre fiamme che s'avventassero contro le prime, soffocandole. . . .

Ciò che sta cercando d'imitare pure il partito liberale-radical ticinese. . . . Trovando che di partiti politici ce ne sono troppo pochi nel Ticino, pensarono bene di dividersi in due campi, nettamente distinti, ognuno con criteri, capi, giornali propri. . . . tanto ben distinti che alla fin fine c'è chi non sa più se appartiene al partito liberale-radical oppure al partito liberale-radical democratico; i due gruppi tengono manifestazioni, organizzano riunioni, cercando chi più può avere il maggior numero di seguaci, pronti poi sempre ad attaccarsi a vicenda. . . . ed i vessilli, i gonfaloni, svolazzano, dopo ogni manifestazione, sul piazzale della Stazione della capitale, che guarda, incuriosita quella novità. . . . Così le discussioni politiche, le schermaglie, si accentuano sempre di più, e tutti, con la buona intenzione di essere i salvatori della terra loro, inveiscono, arruffando le cose, facendo forse i danni del cantone al quale, con tanto slancio, tutti intendono dare il massimo benessere. . . .

Proprio vero. Tante teste tant'idee. — Veramente io, come donna, la politica non dovrei toccarla, anche perchè me ne intendo ben poco di essa — quel tanto solo che basti per non farmi ri-

tenere completa citrulla da chi mi parli di politica; quel tanto che basti per comprendere al minimo le sorti del mio paese; tutta la mia politica potrebbe rinchiudersi in una pillola. . . . amarognola (non posso pensare alla politica dolciastra!) — anche se, in altri tempi ed in altra nazione, io, un giorno, tutta pomposa, me ne andai a votare. . . . votazione alla quale partecipai più per peccato (e da qui questa mia pubblica confessione. . . . per penitenza!) di curiosità e d'orgoglio che per convinzione. Di curiosità per vedere come si svolgono queste famose votazioni; per orgoglio per poter dire, con un tantin di commiserazione forse: "Ho votato anch'io" a chi non può votare trovandosi in paesi dove, alle donne, ciò non è permesso; (e fanno benissimo: alla donna il focolare domestico, all'uomo. . . la fornace politica; alla donna lo scavare, serena, il giardino casalingo, all'uomo lo scavare, nella politica, solchi che si fanno sempre più profondi magari. . . ed infruttuosi). Ma. . . segno dei tempi anche questo: la donna vuol cacciarsi ovunque — ed anche nel piccolo Ticino, come nelle grandi metropoli, gli uffici sono pieni di tanti bei (sempre?) sorrisi femminili. . . e le macchine da scrivere cantano allegramente, toccate da gentili manine ben tenute. . . i numeri (quei numeracci, bestia nera quasi sempre delle bimbe, a scuola) diventano disegni leggiadri se trattati da una matita che sa di Coty. . . ed i giovanotti passeggiavano intanto. . . assillati dal come e da dove far partire un impiego — per dieci gendarmi richiesti, trecento i concorrenti. . . Anche il Ticino ha le sue business girls. . . relativa disoccupazione maschile. . . Modernissimo quindi il Ticino! — Press'a poco cento sono le sue maestre disoccupate; finalmente, però, è venuta la tanto attesa legge (e tanto combattuta!): alla maestra che si sposa il Dipartimento Pubblica Educazione fa il regalo di obbligarla a starsene a casa. . . . cedere il posto a chi, per intanto, non ha ancora il maritino. . . così. . . il giovanotto che vuol sposare una docente, sa ora che la sua dolce metà dovrà insegnare alle caseruole, alle scope, alle vivande, tutta la scienza che prima scodellava a scuola; ed invece di poter dire: "mia moglie guadagna tanto e tanto facendo scuola" potrà concedersi il lusso di esclamare: "mia moglie spende tanto e tanto facendo la massaia!"...
Febbraio, 1934.

ELENA GHIRINGHELLI LUNGI.

LA SUISSE ET LE MONDE.

Par G. de REYNOLD.

A l'entrée d'un monde nouveau, en présence de théories appliquées comme le racisme, la Suisse doit se demander quelle est sa raison d'être.

Notre raison d'être n'est point de l'ordre économique. La Suisse a plus d'un million d'habitants qu'elle ne peut nourrir. Elle est sans issue vers la mer, sans colonies, sans matières premières; un tiers de son territoire est stérile. Elle est donc incapable de fonder son existence sur le motif économique.

N'aurions-nous donc qu'une raison d'être politique? Celle-ci encore serait insuffisante. Le politique possède une valeur supérieure à l'économique, mais, comme ce dernier, il n'est qu'un moyen, non une fin en soi.

Il est vrai que nous devons nous efforcer de différer politiquement le plus possible de nos voisins, puisque nous ne saurions en différer par la race ni la langue. Mais la démocratie avec ses tendances à la centralisation étatique menace de nous conduire de par les nécessités de la crise au même régime unitaire que celui de nos voisins. La raison d'être de la Suisse est son histoire et l'idéal de société humaine que dégage cette histoire.

Nous sommes de la plus vieille civilisation occidentale. Nous la résumons sous ses deux aspects latin et german, méditerranéen et nordique. Notre puissance à la vie indépendante, née le 1er août 1291, est le résultat d'une longue gestation. Entre le fossé du Rhin, le rempart des Alpes et la barrière du Jura, depuis l'époque post-glaciaire, la nature avait dégagé un espace pour être la cellule de communautés libres. L'assemblée des hommes qui délibéraient en armes, sous la présidence du chef, et qui survit dans les Landsgemeinde d'Unterwald et des Appenzell, apparaît avant César et la conquête romaine.

Avec les barbares, la frontière des lanpostes surgit, Germains encadrés de Latins, à l'Ouest et au Sud. Les plus nombreux de ces barbares, les Alamans, apportent une force politique, un esprit d'indépendance qui agit comme un aimant: nos cantons et notre système de milices viennent d'eux. Le corps de la Suisse est déjà sorti de la terre, modelé sur celle-ci: s'il lui manque une

DIALOGUE ON DEBTS.

The American Dilemma.

A correspondent has directed our attention to a most interesting article by Mr. Irving Brant which was published in the November issue of "International Conciliation," a monthly pamphlet issued by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Worcester, Mass., U.S.A. The article takes the form of a witty dialogue, but its humour adds piquancy to an expression of sound common sense. It begins with a definition of War debts and proceeds:—

Q.—How was the money sent to Europe?

A.—The money was not sent to Europe. It was paid to American manufacturers, farmers and other business men by a committee of the American War Industries Board.

Q.—What for?

A.—Munitions of war, food, cotton and other supplies sent to our Allies; transportation, shipping, interest.

Q.—How much was loaned after the Armistice?

A.—\$2,500,000,000, plus \$740,000,000 in relief supplies.

Q.—How was this post-Armistice money sent to Europe?

A.—It was not sent to Europe. It was practically all spent in the United States for the purchase of War supplies, cereals and cotton sent to our Allies.

Q.—Why were these loans made to the Allied Powers after the Armistice?

A.—The principal reason given by the Secretary of the Treasury was that these loans would enable American business men to complete their War-time contracts with the Allied Powers. If these contracts were suddenly cancelled, he said, it would have an injurious effect upon American business.

The question of the rate of interest is thus discussed:—

Q.—Why should England pay 3.3 per cent. while France pays only 1.6 per cent.?

A.—Because England was looked upon as a wealthy, powerful nation, while France was poor and struggling?

Q.—How much does England owe?

A.—\$4,300,000,000.

Q.—How much gold has England?

A.—\$800,000,000.

Q.—How much does France owe?

A.—\$3,800,000,000.

Q.—How much gold has France?

A.—\$3,400,000,000.

Q.—Then is France really a poorer and more struggling nation than England?

A.—Not poorer, but more struggling. France struggles much harder to keep her gold.

Economic Law.

The French, it is explained, expected to pay their debt with money obtained from Germany.

Q.—Why should the French have such an expectation?

A.—It seemed a natural line of reasoning to them. Germany was to pay the cost of the War. The debt to the United States was part of the cost of the War. Therefore Germany should pay the French debt. That was the way they figured it.

Q.—Had Germany been doing so?

A.—Yes. All French payments on the War debt were made with reparations money from Germany.

Q.—Where did Germany get the money?

A.—Germany borrowed it from the United States.

Q.—So the United States loaned money to Germany with which to pay France, so that France could use it to pay the United States?

A.—Yes.

Q.—What about England?

A.—It was the same way there, only more round about. The United States loaned money to Germany. Germany paid it to France. France used part of it to pay off her War debt to England. England sent it to the United States.

Q.—Of the entire three billion dollars paid by European nations on their War debts to the United States since the Armistice, how much was paid out of American money loaned to Europe?

A.—All of it.

Q.—Then the United States really hasn't collected a cent?

A.—Not a cent. We have merely loaned the money with which we have been repaid.

Q.—Why did Germany quit paying reparations?

A.—Because the United States quit loaning money to her.

Q.—Then the War debt payments have stopped in reality because we have stopped loaning our debtors the money with which to repay us?

A.—Exactly.

Q.—How did we ever let them put over a trick like that?

A.—It wasn't a trick. It was the result of economic law.

Q.—What economic law? What is the real reason we can't collect our War debts?

A.—The fundamental reason is that we made the loans in the form of goods, and we insist on being repaid in gold.

Q.—Is there any way we can collect the War debts?

A.—Yes.

Q.—How?

A.—By taking payment in goods and services. By importing more goods than we export. By accepting an "unfavourable" balance of trade.

Q.—Is this generally understood?

A.—It has been said a thousand times in the past ten years, and still the country won't believe it.

The Conclusion.

The discussion then turns to the alternative means of accepting payment and their social and economic consequences, leading to this dramatic passage:—

Q.—When we refuse to accept goods in payment of the debt, aren't we ourselves proposing to cancel it?

A.—Exactly. In theory we say "Pay." But in practice we say "Cancel."

Q.—How will it end?

A.—In cancellation. The economic forces opposing payment are too powerful.

After discussing the fundamental difference between domestic expenditure on armaments and making payments oversea, the dialogue goes on:

Q.—Didn't we issue Liberty Bonds to make these loans? If Europe won't pay, won't we have to tax ourselves to pay off the Liberty Bonds?

A.—We surely will.

Q.—Well, doesn't that prove we are right, morally?

A.—Morally, we are always right.

Q.—France has gold. Why can't France pay?

A.—France cherishes this delusion that this money was a gift to make the world safe for democracy.

Q.—Where did that idea originate?

A.—Mostly in the French imagination. But several unfortunate remarks were made in Congress, during the debate on granting the first War loans in 1917.

These remarks showed that the possibility of the debt not being repaid was clearly envisaged in the United States.

(The Times Trade and Engineering Supplement, March.)