

British Federalists' Influence on Altiero Spinelli and hence on European Federalists

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Abstract

Menurut Altiero Spinelli — salah seorang pencetus gerakan penyatuan Eropa, demokrasi dapat menyatukan sekelompok negara-negara yang berdaulat demi meraih kepentingan bersama. Dalam pidatonya pada Kongres Pendirian UEF tahun 1947, Spinelli menegaskan, bahwa Marshall Plan telah membuka kesempatan bagi Eropa untuk mewujudkan hal tersebut. Menurutnya, apabila bangsa-bangsa di Eropa gagal menggunakan kesempatan ini, maka Amerika Serikat akan menjejakkan kaki di Eropa dengan mengubah liberalisme menjadi imperialisme. Ia berpendapat bahwa penyatuan Eropa memiliki arti yang sangat penting sebagai langkah awal dari penyatuan dunia, sebagaimana disarankan dalam *Ventotene Manifesto*.

Keywords: federalism, European Union, integration

It was during World War Two that Altiero Spinelli became a federalist while in confinement at Ventotene, a small island in the Tyrrhenian sea off the coast between Rome and Naples. When he was arrested and then convicted by the fascist special tribunal in 1927, he was twenty years

* Altiero Spinelli is an Italian politician, who was in 1941, together with Ernesto Rossi, set up the Ventotene Manifesto, in which described the crisis of the European nation-state and illustrated that the only solution of this was the foundation of the European federation. Furthermore Spinelli founded the Movimento Federalista Europeo (European Federalist Movement) on 1943 in Milan. Spinelli's thought was largely influenced by the writings of Luigi Einaudi and Lionel

Robbins. His political outlook based on two theoretical pillars, which are American constitutionalism and the concept of "crisis of nation-state". In 1944, Spinelli and Rossi, succeed in organizing a conference of representatives of European resistance and liberation movement. Therefore this conference represented a step forward for the organizations of federalist movement into European level, which occurred in 1964 in Paris.

old and was a leader of the young communists. His solitary reflection in jail led him to choose the value of freedom and to give up communism in 1937. The choice of democracy represented for Spinelli only the beginning of a difficult intellectual journey. What distinguishes his intellectual itinerary from that of other antifascists who gave up communism and chose democracy - be it liberal be it socialist - is the fact that the performance of democracy, such as it was in Britain and France in the inter-war period, was deeply disappointing to him. His judgement on it was severe. Failing to provide effective opposition to the fascist states, it appeared to him as a "great decomposing body". By 1941, however, Britain, alone resisting Nazi power, had transformed itself "in the eyes of all European democrats" into their "ideal homeland".¹

Einaudi and Robbins, the Sources of the Spinelli's Federalist Culture

The encounter in 1939 at Ventotene with Ernesto Rossi, one of the leaders of the liberal-socialist movement²

"Giustizia e Libertà", whose affinities were "all with the eighteenth century enlightenment, particularly English and French", marked Spinelli for life, since Rossi was the vehicle of federalist culture. Spinelli describes his ideological mutation in these terms: "In that place I was born a second time ... There my true life began".³

In a vivid autobiographical page of his memoirs Spinelli described how he discovered federalism and what are the sources of his federalist thinking:

"In a volume of writings by Luigi Einaudi reproducing a few articles he published in the 'Corriere della sera' at the beginning of 1919, using the pen name Junius,⁴ ... the author brought the project of the League of Nations before the tribunal of reason, found it wholly groundless, and, recalling the constitutional events which led to the foundation of the United States of America, proposed a real federation uniting under the rule of law the peoples which were getting out of the blood bath.

In the following years I have often been thinking that really *habent sua fata libelli* (little books have their own

1 A. Spinelli, *Come ho tentato di diventare saggio*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2006, pp. 257, 311.

2 *Socialismo liberale*, (1928), Torino, Einaudi, 1979 is a seminal book of Carlo Rosselli, where he advocated democratic and liberal political institutions, a mixed economy, social justice and international peace.

3 A. Spinelli, *op. cit.*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2006, p. 261, 302.

4 The reference of this book is Junius, *Lettere politiche*, Bari, Laterza, 1920. This book has never been reprinted. However, the most significant articles have been reproduced in L. Einaudi, *La guerra e l'unità europea*, Milano, Comunità, 1948, reprinted several times in the post-war period.

destiny). When those pages were written, they were received with indifference and the author himself put them aside, since he did not feel it necessary to dig more deeply into that matter. About twenty years later that book accidentally fell under the eyes of two people who had been living for more than ten years isolated from the rest of the world and were then observing with anxious interest the tragedy that had begun in Europe. We perceived that these pages were not written in vain, since they were beginning to fructify in our minds.

Requested by Rossi, who as a professor of economics was authorised to write to him, Einaudi sent him two or three booklets of English federalist literature which had flourished toward the end of the thirties as a result of Lord Lothian's influence. Apart from Lionel Robbins's book *The Economic Causes of War*, which I subsequently translated and which was published by the publishing house Einaudi, I cannot recall the titles or authors of others. But their analysis of the political and economic perversion that nationalism leads to, and their reasoned presentation of the federal alternative, have remained to this day impressed on my memory like a revelation.

Since I was looking for mental clarity and precision, I was not attracted by the foggy and contorted ideological federalism of Proudhon or Mazzini, but by the clean, precise thinking of these English federalists, in whose writings I found a very

good method for analysing the chaotic state of affairs into which Europe was plunging and for drawing up alternative prospects".⁵

The list of the books he read from 1937 up to 1943, when he was released, discovered in Spinelli's archives, enables us to recover what time had erased from his memory.⁶ In addition to the above-mentioned titles of Einaudi and Robbins, there are three more Robbins's books, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, *The Great Depression and Economic Planning and International Order*, together with a collection of essays by Friedrich Hayek, entitled *Collectivist Economic Planning* and Samuel Morison's *The Oxford History of the United States*. Apart from two books by Carlo Cattaneo, an Italian federalist writer who advocated both the United States of Italy and the United States of Europe in the nineteenth century, no other federalist work is included in the list.

An anthology, which collects writings of William Beveridge, Lionel Robbins and Altiero Spinelli, including excerpts of the *Ventotene Manifesto*, edited and introduced by John Pinder, offers a full elaboration of the argument. In the introduction he writes: "Altiero Spinelli, the greatest

5 A. Spinelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 307-308.

6 A. Spinelli, *Machiavelli nel secolo XX. Scritti del confino e della clandestinità. 1941-1944*, edited by Piero Graglia, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993, pp. 522-533.

prophet and advocate of post-war European federalism, owed more to the British federalist writings than to any other source".⁷

The Influence of American Constitutionalism

Even *The Federalist Papers* were not among the books of Spinelli's library at Ventotene. This means that what can be considered the Old Testament in the federalist tradition is not among the sources of the *Ventotene Manifesto*.⁸ It is beyond argument that *The Federalist Papers* exerted an indirect influence on Spinelli's thinking, not only through the writings of Einaudi, but also those of Robbins. The latter, summarising the subject of *Economic Planning and International Order* — a book quoted several times in the essays written by Spinelli at Ventotene after the *Manifesto* — affirmed that it "included an analysis of the case for international federation based ... on the argument of Hamilton and his

fellow authors of *The Federalist*, but applied to the international anarchy of the twentieth century".⁹ Moreover, *The Economic Causes of War*, the other Robbins's book, which Spinelli quoted in his Ventotene essays — a book which both Spinelli and Rossi¹⁰ claim to have translated into Italian, a controversy which historians have not yet solved — was an attempt to apply to the contemporary world the theory of the authors of *The Federalist*, which shows that the ultimate cause of war lies in state sovereignty, not in capitalism.

All this shows that both the British and the Italian federalists have common ancestors, the Founding Fathers of the Constitution of the United States of America and a common cultural matrix, American constitutionalism. The transition of the United States from confederation to federation shows that with a federal government a system of independent states can achieve an irreversible unity and a durable peace. The American Civil War is the exception which proves the rule. In other words, constitutional federalism represents the remedy to international anarchy and a powerful instrument to overcome international economic disorder.

7 J. Pinder (ed), *Altiero Spinelli and the British Federalists*, London, Federal Trust, 1998, p. VIII. On the same subject see also J. Pinder, *Federalism in Britain and Italy: Radicals and the English Liberal Tradition*, in P.M.R. Stirk (ed.), *European Unity in Context: The Interwar Period*, London, Pinter Publishers, 1989, pp. 201-223, reprinted in L. Levi (ed.), *Altiero Spinelli and Federalism in Europe and the World*, Milano, Angeli, 1990, pp. 85-110.

8 A. Spinelli, E. Rossi, *The Ventotene Manifesto*, Ventotene, The Altiero Spinelli Institute for Federalist Studies, 1988.

9 L. Robbins, *Autobiography of an Economist*, London, Macmillan, 1971, p. 160.

10 E. Rossi claims the authorship of this translation in *Miserie e splendori del confino di polizia. Lettere da Ventotene. 1939-1943*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1981, p. 149.

The Crisis of the Nation-State

Beside American constitutionalism, there is a second theoretical pillar of Spinelli's political outlook: the concept of "crisis of the nation-state". This concept occupies in federalist theory the same place as the concept of "crisis of absolute monarchy" in liberal theory and the concept of "crisis of capitalism" in marxist theory. It enables us to identify the fundamental contradiction of our age, to formulate a comprehensive historical judgement on it and to provide a clear interpretation of the problems of our epoch based on new theoretical principles in comparison with traditional thinking. What Einaudi and the British federalist school showed was that the national form of the state was unable to cope with the basic trends in the course of history (internationalisation of the productive process, formation of a world system of states, supremacy of states with macro-regional dimension). Furthermore, they pointed out the relationship between the crisis of the European states system and German imperialism, world wars, international economic disorder and the authoritarian degeneration of the structure of nation-states.

Spinelli in Switzerland

It was only when he became a political refugee in Switzerland shortly after the foundation of the European Federalist Movement in Italy (Milan, 27-28 August 1943) that Spinelli had free access to the British

and American federalist literature in the library of the League of Nations in Geneva. There he completed his federalist education.

What inspired Spinelli's and Rossi's decision to migrate to Switzerland was the need to find other federalists in Europe, in order to be able to organise a federalist movement at European level and to initiate a common action for the United States of Europe. After sixteen years of imprisonment, Spinelli had no relationship with the other resistance movements in Europe. He compared himself to an astronomer, who simply by studying the disturbance of the orbit of the farthest planet, without scanning the sky with a telescope, was able to forecast the existence of a new planet.¹¹

Spinelli was convinced that the resistance movements had drawn the same lesson from fascism and war and had elaborated similar plans for the reorganisation of Europe in a federal form; that the common commitment for European Federation could not be pursued without a common political organisation; and that the overcoming of national borders, conceived as the boundaries of political action, represented for federalists an absolute necessity.

In 1944 Spinelli and Rossi succeeded in organising a conference of representatives of European resistance

11 A. Spinelli, *Come ho tentato di diventare saggio*, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

and liberation movements from nine countries which adopted two declarations: a statement of solidarity with the movements fighting against Nazism, and a manifesto for the United States of Europe. In spite of the difficulties in communications during the war, the Resistance leaders succeeded in circulating their ideas all over Europe.

This meeting represented a step forward towards the organisation of a federalist movement at European level, which was to occur in 1946 in Paris. The federalist organisations of most European countries joined this movement (the UEF). This year we celebrate the 60th anniversary of its foundation.

During their stay in Switzerland, Spinelli and Rossi kept in touch with Einaudi, who was, as we have seen, the vehicle for the dissemination of British federalist literature at Ventotene. It must be noted that Einaudi was familiar with this literature. It is sufficient to read the bibliography at the end of his book entitled *La guerra e l'unità europea* (*War and European Unity*) to perceive how ample was his knowledge of that political and economic tradition.¹²

Spinelli recalls in his memoirs the encounter between Rossi and Einaudi in Geneva. When Rossi recollected the role of the Political Letters of Junius as the foundation stone of the federalist outlook elaborated in

Ventotene, Einaudi stated that, in the meanwhile, his interest had shifted to the functionalist theory of the Romanian economist David Mitrany, who just in 1943 had written a book entitled *A Working Peace System* and published by the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London.¹³ It is to be noticed that Mitrany was not only a functionalist, but also an anti-federalist.

Einaudi acknowledged that this choice was a consequence of the fact that the message he had launched at the end of WWI had "remained unheeded and he himself had almost forgotten it. But he was clearly struck by the encounter with a man who had listened to it and was working for its dissemination. He was fascinated by Rossi and promised him to commit himself again to follow that way, kept his word and we benefited from his precious support till the end of his life".¹⁴

His federalist commitment started during his stay in Switzerland, where, as he noted in his diary, he attended several meetings of federalist refugees belonging to the resistance movements of France, Germany, The Netherlands and Yugoslavia. As a result of those discussions he came to the conclusion that "The best project was the English one of Federal Union".¹⁵

13 D. Mitrany, *A Working Peace System*, London, Oxford University Press, 1943.

14 A. Spinelli, *Come ho tentato di diventare saggio*, op. cit., p. 389.

15 L. Einaudi, *Diario d'esilio. 1943-1944*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997, p. 140.

12 See note 4.

As a matter of fact, as regards Federal Union's influence on Spinelli, Richard Mayne and John Pinder wrote: "When Federal Union's members examined the Manifesto, they were especially pleased to find that it echoed some of the language they had used in documents of their own".¹⁶

The longer we observe Spinelli's activities after his release, the more evident becomes the distance which separates him from Einaudi, whose little book written twenty years earlier had revealed him the main features of federalist theory. In Einaudi's works no political proposal on how to carry out the federalist design can be found. Once he had illustrated the nature of the objective to be pursued, he considered his task accomplished. After all, this was also the limit to Rossi's political outlook. Anybody who reads his most important essay on European federalism, *Gli Stati Uniti d'Europa (The United States of Europe)*,¹⁷ published in Switzerland in 1944, can remark that his masterly illustration of the historical and political reasons for European unification is not associated with any reflection on the action which is necessary to pursue that objective.

Spinelli's Theory of Action

It is in the field of political action that Spinelli's role has a really innovatory significance in comparison with all the previous federalist experience. The *Ventotene Manifesto* represents the starting point in the development of a new field of federalist thinking: a theory of democratic action for uniting a group of sovereign states.

I think that in Spinelli's theory of action we can identify five guiding principles.

- (1) The current relevance of the European Federation, which is no longer conceived as a distant ultimate goal, but as a political programme of a new generation of politicians who have learnt the lesson of World Wars.
- (2) The strategic priority of the objective of European Federation as compared with reform of nation-states, which represents a reversal of the order of priorities inspiring the conduct of political parties.
- (3) The shift of the focus of political struggle from the national to the international level, which implies a new cleavage between the progressive and conservative forces no more identified in the dividing line between the principles of greater or lesser liberalism or socialism, but in the alternative between nationalism and federalism.
- (4) The construction of a new independent federalist force (the European Federalist Movement), conceived as the vehicle for the struggle for the European Federation. More precisely the consent of public opinion to the

16 R. Mayne, J. Pinder, *Federal Union: The Pioneers. A History of Federal Union*, London, MacMillan, 1990, p. 84.

17 Storeno (pen name of E. Rossi) *Gli Stati Uniti d'Europa*, Lugano, Nuove Edizioni di Capolago, 1944. Anastatic reprint edited by S. Pistone, Torino, CELID, 2004.

federalist project can enable the European Federalist Movement to push national governments to transfer their sovereignty to a European level. (5) The European constituent assembly is the only tool to frame the European federal institutions, which cannot spring from the method of inter-governmental negotiations.¹⁸

The progress of ideas, if it is to be a true progress, depends on cooperation among many persons who seek a solution to the problems of humanity. It is a collective effort of many participating in a common undertaking: the improvement of the conditions of political life. This means that reason is the element that connects the several phases of human history, links past to future generations and enlightens the march of humanity in history.

This reflection on the nature of progress applies to Spinelli too. He did not start from scratch. The Founding Fathers of the United States of America, the reformers of the Commonwealth, the promoters of Federal Union had addressed similar problems and made an attempt to find a solution to them. This is the framework in which British federalists' influence on him should be studied.

¹⁸ An essay, recently published in a reprint of the *Ventotene Manifesto*, has offered me the opportunity to expand and elaborate each of these points. L. Levi, *Altiero Spinelli, fondatore del movimento per l'unità europea*, in A. Spinelli, E. Rossi, *Il Manifesto di Ventotene*, Milano, Mondadori, 2006, pp. 163-240.

Even though, on the whole, it is more appropriate to speak of a mutual influence between British federalists and Spinelli, at the beginning, Spinelli's federalist choice, as he himself acknowledges, was largely influenced by the British literature. That was the main source of his federalist learning. But, as soon as he had absorbed the fundamental principles of federalist theory, he became the founder of the movement for European unity. Spinelli's theory of federalist action, whose first formulation is contained in the *Ventotene Manifesto*, transformed federalism, which, until then, was placed in the world of ideas, into an action programme of an international political movement going far beyond the effective political action of Federal Union in the years 1938-1940.

The Constituent Assembly

Let us consider, by way of example, one of Spinelli's most characteristic political proposals: the European constituent assembly. Although the concept of constituent assembly is foreign to the constitutional history of Britain and the British people never had any experience of such a method for building institution, the application of this idea to the construction of federal institutions developed first during the discussions on federal reform of the British empire. However, Lionel Curtis maintained that the habit of viewing constitutional change in British history as a gradual

process is not in keeping with facts.

The main assumption on which Curtis based his theory of constitutional change is that changes which it was necessary to effect in order to transform the Commonwealth into a federation "must all be realized together and simultaneously by passing a constitutional statute".¹⁹ In Curtis's opinion, "there can be no intermediate period" during which the governments of the Dominions and the Commonwealth can co-exist. The birth of the British constitution shows that "the Union of England and Scotland ... was consummated by means of a 'cut-and-dried' plan, and could not possibly have been effected in any other way. It was 'cut' in the shape of articles discussed and agreed upon by English and Scottish Commissioners appointed for that purpose in 1706, and by them drafted into the form of a Bill, which in 1707 was 'dried' or perpetuated as a legal enactment by the Scottish and English Parliaments ... A brand-new state was created by an instrument of government deliberately devised and consciously adopted by the two Parliaments; and each, in doing so, effaced itself. This instrument was the written constitution of the new state they brought into existence; and its character as a written constitution is in no way altered by the fact that it has since become overlaid by a mass

of subsequent usages and enactments. In no other way could a voluntary union have been effected".²⁰

On the other hand, Curtis asserted the necessity of popular consent in the procedure which is adopted for drafting the Constitution. The historical experience brings ample evidence that this is a general tendency. In the United States "in 1787 the states appointed delegates who met at Philadelphia, framed a constitution, and submitted it for acceptance or refusal by the people of each state". In Canada "delegates from all the provinces met at Quebec in October 1864 and framed a series of resolutions, which were then submitted for approval to each of their legislatures. When adopted by" the provinces, "the resolutions were embodied in a Bill, to which legal effect was given in 1867 by an Act of the Imperial Parliament". In Australia "a series of Conventions produced a series of drafts, the last Convention completing its work in 1898. The scheme was then submitted by the parliaments of each colony in the form of a carefully drafted Bill to the electors themselves". In South Africa "the same procedure was followed so far as Natal was concerned. In the other colonies the scheme for union was accepted by each parliament without a referendum or direct election".²¹

19 L. Curtis, *The Problem of the Commonwealth*, London, Macmillan, 1916, p. 222.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 228-229.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 239-240.

Curtis's second assumption is that "The Convention is the procedure necessary for the expression of public opinion ... A Convention ... is ... essential to the principle of government by public opinion. Any attempt to settle such questions without first holding a Convention means that politicians are manoeuvring either to avoid a settlement or to make one behind the backs of the electorates".²²

It is well known that the outbreak of World War One shattered the dream of a closer union of the Commonwealth. Nationalism, the poisoned fruit generated by war, brought about the disruption of all multinational empires. The federalist alternative to the organisation of the world into sovereign states was not yet ripe.

In conclusion, it is to be noted that the historical evolution of European integration represents a refutation of Curtis's opinion on the transition of a system of independent communities from division to unity. Although European integration has lasted longer than half a century and has created powerful institutions such as a European Parliament directly elected and endowed with legislative powers, a European Central Bank and a single currency, it is still an unaccomplished process. It began in 1951 with the European Coal and Steel Community and has not yet come to an end with

the European Constitution not simply because the latter has not been ratified, but because it maintains the right of veto in crucial matters such as fiscal, foreign, security and defence policies and constitutional revision procedure. In other words, the Constitution leaves a considerable amount of powers in the hands of member states and perpetuates the subordination of the European Union to national governments in the above-mentioned matters.

At the beginning, Spinelli followed the Curtis's model, but progressively departed from it, since he perceived that the unification of Europe was developing according to the method of constitutional gradualism, which has led to the bestowal of exclusive competences (commercial and fisheries policies and customs union) to the European Community, to the direct election of the European Parliament, to the monetary union and now to the Constitution. I will address this issue in the last paragraph.

On the other hand, Spinelli remained faithful to the idea of the constituent assembly, conceived as the necessary procedure which must be adopted in order to associate the people of two or more communities to the framing of the Constitution establishing a common government. The Conventions which drew up the Charter of Fundamental Rights in 2000 and the Constitution in 2002-2003 represent a confirmation of the need to associate the representatives of the

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 240-242.

peoples in the constitutional process and to withdraw from the governments the monopoly of decision-making power over constitutional matters.

Federalism as a Political Priority: The Difference between Spinelli and Rossi

For Spinelli, federalism was a political priority. It was not simply an adjunct (or an accessory) to liberalism, as it was for his teachers – Einaudi and Robbins – or to socialism, as it was for Barbara Wootton. Spinelli regarded federalism as a real political alternative to Europe's organisation into sovereign states. Unlike political parties (and traditional ideologies inspiring them) which generally continue to confine themselves to plan government or regime changes within state borders, but do not question their own state, the federalist project aims at a more radical change, which affects the very nature of the state, i.e. its transformation into a member state of a federation. For Spinelli, federalism is the response to the greatest problems of contemporary society, which have acquired much wider dimensions than nation-states. The federalist outlook is the expression of the awareness that the European unification and the unification of other great regions of the world in the perspective of world unity, have the priority over the goal of renewing individual states considered separately.

Federalism is "a canon for the interpretation of politics".²³ In a passage of his diary Spinelli enunciates this important definition of federalism. The adoption of this point of view enables us to distinguish Spinelli's from Rossi's approach to federalism. In Spinelli's opinion, Rossi "did not even suspect" that this could be the nature of federalism.

Rossi conceives federalism simply as a method of the organisation of power, a constitutional technique which abolishes armed conflicts among states which have subscribed to a federal pact. In other words, federation appears as an alternative to war and not the response to the main problems of the current phase of history characterised by the historical crisis of the nation-state. Conceived in these terms, federalism is simply the completion of liberalism and socialism, a means to protect the values promoted by these ideologies from the negative consequences of international anarchy. In comparison with Spinelli, Rossi's adherence to federalism had a weaker motivation. The practical consequence of this standpoint was the Rossi's giving up of the European Federalist Movement after the fall of the European Defence Community in 1954, when, owing to the thawing of the Cold War, the danger of a Third World War began to lessen.

23 A. Spinelli, *Diario europeo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1989, vol. I, p. 214.

The Political Itinerary of Lionel Robbins

It is to be noted that Lionel Robbins's political itinerary shows similarities to the Rossi's one.

The realisation that a truly international economy required an international rule of law led Robbins to advocate a global federal order. "There is world economy. But there is no world polity", he wrote in *Economic Planning and International Order*.²⁴ This was why international politics was still at the mercy of the brutish law of the "state of nature". Therefore, in this book Robbins concluded that a federal framework should be applied to the world.

In *The Economic Causes of War* he developed his ideas in order to show the limits of the marxist theory of imperialism and to present federalism as the solution to the problem of war, which in fact broke out in September 1939 while he was concluding the final chapter of this book. Entitled "The Ultimate Cause of International Conflict", it was a passionate peroration for the United States of Europe. Here he clarified his position on the relationship between world and European federalism. The second objective represented, at that time, his first priority. He qualified "utopian" a federation of world dimensions, since "there is not sufficient feeling of a

common citizenship", there is "no sufficiently generalized culture" and "even the electoral problems of such a body would present insurmountable difficulties".²⁵ We could add another outstanding difficulty, which was still active after the World Wars, especially during the Cold War, i.e. the deep cleavages which were dividing the states in the international system. Of course, a world federation is "the divine event towards which all that is good in the heritage of the diverse civilizations of the world, invites us to strive".²⁶ But it is a distant ultimate goal of human history.

On the contrary, in Robbins's opinion, it is not utopian to strive for more limited federations. In particular in Europe the economic and technological evolution was imposing the overcoming of national sovereignties. "As gunpowder rendered obsolete the feudal system", Robbins wrote, "so the aeroplane renders obsolete the system of the independent sovereignties of Europe". And concluded with this cogent argumentation: "A more comprehensive type of organization is inevitable. Will it come by mutual agreement or by caesarian conquest? That is the unsolved question. For either there must be empire or federation; on a long view, there is no alternative".²⁷

24 L. Robbins, *Economic Planning and International Order*, London, Macmillan, 1937, p. 239.

25 L. Robbins, *The Economic Causes of War*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1939, p. 105.

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*, p. 107.

The war had shown how obsolete was the organisation of Europe into nation-states. There was no alternative to the European union. What remained undetermined was the way that goal could be reached. The choice was between an empire in the European continent under German rule or a federation including a democratic Germany.

Churchill's proposal for a Franco-British Union in June 1940 represents the extraordinary convergence between a government position and federalist ideas, which had found in Federal Union its organised expression. The unfortunate attempt to follow a new way — a federalist way — in the construction of peace can be explained only by the war and the desperate struggle for life which Britain was facing. Jean Monnet²⁸ was the author of Churchill's plan. When France was occupied by the Nazi army, he was at London, where he was President of the Franco-British coordination committee, created to organise a joint military action. Monnet's special talent lay in his capacity to influence crucial decisions, working far from the limelight, in the background where the future is prepared patiently.

Aside from that episode, Churchill always pursued the UK independence

in relation to Europe and the United States. In an article of 1930, with a beautiful concise expression, which is a special quality of the English language, he had stated: "We have our own dream ... We are with Europe, but not of it".²⁹ In other words, Churchill envisaged European integration only for the countries of the continent, not for Britain. This is the fundamental meaning of the message he launched from the University of Zürich in 1946, when he supported again the idea of "a kind of United States of Europe", but keeping for Britain the role of a sponsor from the outside. For him, a united Europe was first of all the necessary bulwark against Soviet expansionism.

Unlike Lord Lothian, another towering exponent of British federalism, who died in 1940 during World War Two, Robbins lived until 1984. Thus, he witnessed the development of European unification until the direct election of the European Parliament. He never repudiated either the idea of the decline of the nation-states or his attachment for federalism.

What is paradoxical is the fact that Robbins, who had been one of the most brilliant advocates of European federalism gave up this cause by the time when, after the war, the political

²⁸ Monnet devotes the first chapter of his *Mémoires* (Paris, Fayard, 1976, pp. 13-36) to the narration of this event.

²⁹ W. Churchill, *The United States of Europe*, "Saturday Evening Post", New York, 15 February, 1930, reproduced in R. Ducci, B. Olivi (eds.), *L'Europa incompiuta*, Padova, CEDAM, 1970, p. 37.

conditions for European unification were ripening. In his autobiography he wrote that: "When the United Europe movement was first launched in the shape of the proposals for the Coal and Steel Community, I opposed it. I opposed it, not because I had in any way abandoned my desire for the creation of larger units, but rather because I thought that the creation of this larger unit ran the danger of being inimical to the creation of a still larger one, or at any rate to forms of political and economic co-operation over a wide area which were essential if the Western world were not to fall apart".³⁰ The larger unit to which Robbins was referring to was the Atlantic Community.

He wrote that during the war he "became more and more convinced of the indispensability of continued American co-operation in maintaining the balance of the world. In two world wars the nations of Europe had not succeeded in solving their problems unaided". Consequently, "a continuation, in some form or other, of political and military association between ourselves and the two great unions of North America seemed to me to be the sine qua non for any hope of preserving the civilization of the West". One of the reasons for his disenchantment with the European federalist cause was the anti-Americanism which characterised the attitude of several intellectuals and

³⁰ L. Robbins, *Autobiography of an Economist*, London, Macmillan, 1971, p. 238.

politicians of the continent, especially in France.³¹

In a speech at the UEF founding Congress in 1947 Spinelli affirmed that the recently launched *Marshall Plan* had provided "an opportunity that the European democracies must grasp and turn to their advantage. However, all the Americans can do on these lines is to offer us the opportunity. They can accept the formation of a peaceful and prosperous European union ... But they cannot themselves create such a union, and, if the Europeans cannot seize the opportunity, the US will be more and more tempted to move from the liberal alternative to that of imperialism. This latter alternative is strong in America; it develops in parallel with the former one, and it is this which makes every American initiative and intervention of such crucial importance for us. If democratic Europe does not save itself by its own efforts, making use of the American opportunity, and does not

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 236. It is worth recollecting that in *The Economic Causes of War* Robbins upheld the opposite opinion, when he discussed the Clarence Streit's proposal for a federation of the democracies, including the United States and the British Empire (*Union Now*, New-York-London, Harper and Brothers, 1939). In principle, he had no objection to the scheme: "The larger the federation, the smaller the area of future wars". But he thought that "It does not seem probable that, in our generation at least, the citizens of the United States will feel that compelling urge to union with other peoples which would alone make it possible" (p. 106).

develop federal institutions in the economic and political fields, then it is American imperialism that will prevail".³² Spinelli immediately understood that the Marshall Plan offered a unique opportunity to take an initiative for the European economic and political union within the Western block, so as to create the conditions for an equal partnership between Europe and America. Otherwise, the political division of Europe would have inevitably promoted American imperialism.

It was only in 1960 that Robbins admitted his mistake,³³ when the extraordinary success of the European Community had shown that the root of European integration was the decline of the nation-states and its historical significance was the overcoming of the contradiction between the scale of the major problems and the size of the nation-states, which he had indeed already identified in his two books in the 1930s that had so much influence on Spinelli. Instead, the cohesion of the Atlantic alliance was dependent on the hegemony of the United States. At the same time, the unsuccessful Suez expedition had degraded Britain to a second-class

position in the hierarchy of world powers and the dream of the maritime mission was approaching sunset. Hence the British decision to make the application for membership of the European Community.

This state of uncertainty with regard to the European federation shows that Robbins failed to realise that a successful development of federalism through European unification was in fact essential for the prevalence of pluralist democracy in Europe rather than authoritarian Soviet communism, and hence as the framework for the development of liberalism, as he would have wished, or of other legitimate manifestations of democratic politics. Nor did he, for all his merits, realise that European unification has the significance of a first step in the unification of the world, which, though it is beginning in a part of the world, affects the whole world. The fact is that he did not conceive the European Federation as a political priority, stemming from a new political thinking, as suggested by the Ventotene Manifesto.

The Rise and Decline of Federal Union

The Robbins's political itinerary represents the individual aspect of a wider collective phenomenon: the rise and decline of Federal Union. Between 1938 and 1940 the movement played a leading role in promoting the federal design and exerted a real influence on Churchill's proposal to

32 A. Spinelli, *Dagli Stati sovrani agli Stati Uniti d'Europa*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1950, p. 234.

33 During a speech delivered in Rome in the spring of 1960, entitled *Liberalism and the International Problem* and published in the book *Politics and Economics*, London, Macmillan, 1963, pp. 154-155.

the French government to create a Franco-British Union: the first federalist project promoted by a national government in the history of Europe. It is uncertain how many members joined Federal Union. According to Richard Mayne and John Pinder, they were more than 10,000,³⁴ while Charles Kimber estimates that they were between 14,000 and 60,000.³⁵ More and more local branches were formed. In 1940 they reached the number of 253.³⁶ The movement was supported by so many distinguished people that Mayne and Pinder say that "the establishment" gave it its backing.³⁷ Moreover, the fact that 100,000 copies of *Curry's The Case for Federal Union* were sold after the outbreak of war shows the extraordinary impact that the movement had on British public opinion. The action of Federal Union was so penetrating that it can "claim, with some justification", wrote Charles Kimber, "to have brought the offer of union with France within the 'art of the possible' (at least in that desperate moment). But it also can claim to have put federation at the top of the agenda of such public discussion of 'war aims' as Churchill's insistence on 'unconditional surrender' allowed".³⁸

34 R. Mayne, J. Pinder, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

35 C. Kimber, *The Birth of Federal Union*, "The Federalist Debate", XVIII, 2005, n. 1, p. 13.

36 R. Mayne, J. Pinder, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

38 C. Kimber, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

While the Federal Union Research Institute, created by William Beveridge to discuss the significance and make proposals relating to a European federation, survived the war and became Federal Trust, Federal Union's branches and the organisation suffered severely. In spite of that, as Mayne and Pinder write, "Federal Union had been the prime mover in creating the international federalist movements at both European and world level".³⁹ After the war the organisation remained with some two thousand members, but most of the key figures were no longer active, though Beveridge became a very efficient and energetic President and Mackay was to carry on his federalist campaign in Parliament rather than in Federal Union. Many did not realise that the political framework within which to build the future was Europe. Some federalists chose the political commitment at national level as their priority, some chose other priorities: Atlantic community, world federation and so forth. It was the need to prevent war by means of a federal government above the states that had allowed British public opinion to unite over party lines. But when the war was over, the divisions across party lines prevailed again. However, it is worth mentioning that in 1948 Mackay was able to secure about a hundred

39 R. Mayne, J. Pinder, *op. cit.*, p. 54

signatures from both Labour and Conservative MPs for a motion calling for a constituent assembly to design a European federal constitution, in keeping with Spinelli's ideas.⁴⁰

In the history of federalism, Federal Union represents a milestone: the first example of a federalist movement made up of a group of active members capable of exerting an influence on public opinion and "the establishment", i.e. political, intellectual and social circles, organised over the territory with local branches and a newsletter. This organisational model is not substantially different from that applied by post-war federalist movements.

The Post-War Period

After World War Two the commitment for the European federation appeared much more difficult in Britain than in some other countries of Western Europe. The leadership of the process of European unification was assumed by six countries of the continent, while Britain refused to participate in the European Community. The crisis of the sovereign state was slower to become evident in the British isles than on the continent. Unlike France, Britain did not suffer the humiliation of the Nazi invasion and kept alive until the Suez crisis the dream of a world role among the big powers.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

This means that the first attempt at constructing the European Federation led by Spinelli in the post-war period occurred within the framework of the six founding countries of the European Community without the participation of Britain. It matured in the early fifties following Monnet's initiative to found the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) as a European framework for the reconstruction of Germany. Thanks to Spinelli's intervention, the following initiative to create a European Defence Community (EDC) as accompanied by a constituent process in which the *ad hoc* Assembly (the enlarged ECSC Assembly) was given a mandate to draw up the statute of the European Political Community (EPC), the political body needed to control the European army. It was Spinelli's federalist outlook which enabled him to realise that the European army had to be responsible to a federal government, together with his political genius which enabled him to convince De Gasperi of this to the extent that De Gasperi succeeded in persuading the governments of the other member states to agree to draft the Treaty for the EPC to accompany the EDC. It is worth recalling that the EPC had an only partially federal nature, since it maintained a number of intergovernmental structures and procedures. The process was abruptly halted in 1954, when the French National Assembly rejected the EDC after four out of six member states of

the European Community had already ratified it.

When the European Union of Federalists split after the failure of the EDC, the British federalists chose to join the Action Européenne Fédéraliste (AEF), which supported the European Community, conceived as a step toward the European Federation, while Spinelli launched within the Mouvement Fédéraliste Européen (MFE) the campaign for the Congress of the European People and focused its action for the constituent assembly.

In spite of the weakening of political influence of British federalists in their country, their intellectual contribution to federalism is relevant. It is sufficient to mention the classic book of Kenneth C. Wheare on *Federal Government*,⁴¹ published in 1946, a comparative analysis on the four federations (United States, Switzerland, Canada and Australia) existing at the time. It remains a point of reference for every scholar of federal institutions.

Another example which regards the process of European integration is the distinction drawn by John Pinder in 1968 between "negative" and "positive" integration,⁴² which has become a part of the language

generally utilised to speak of the subject. It provides an essential instrument for distinguishing the stages of European integration. He called the first stage negative because it comprised the elimination of the obstacles to the free circulation of goods, services, capitals and labour, but the second stage positive, since it expressed the need to promote common European policies in the areas of social and regional development, the environment, external trade, currency and foreign and security relations.

The most important contribution of the post-war British federalist school lies in the idea that the construction of the European federation is a gradual process in which both economic and institutional steps forward are closely intertwined. The relevance of this approach becomes evident if we take into account that in 1957 Spinelli published an article entitled *The Common Market Mockery*⁴³ in which he maintained that the objective of the treaty establishing the EEC could not be achieved without a European government. This means that at the beginning of European economic integration Spinelli's guiding idea was that a European government should be conceived as the point of departure in the construction of the European Federation. Of course, in a few years'

41 K. C. Wheare, *Federal Government*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1946.

42 J. Pinder, *Positive Integration and Negative Integration: Some problems of Economic Union in the EEC*, "The World Today", XXIV, 1968, pp. 89-110.

43 A. Spinelli, *L'Europa non cade dal cielo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1960, pp. 282-287.

time Spinelli changed his mind. When he recognised the success of the common market, he began to view the European Community as the embryo of the European federation. "In a strange and precarious but unquestionable way Europe is coming into existence", he noted in his Diary⁴⁴ in 1962.

Spinelli's second attempt at constructing the European federation, matured after the direct election of the European Parliament, of which he was member, highlights his changed opinion regarding the nature of the European Community. The opportunity was given by the contradiction of an elected Parliament with mainly consultative powers, which made it possible to begin the struggle to attribute the power to make laws and control the executive to the sovereign people through Parliamentary representation. The latest incarnation of his particular idea of a constituent assembly is represented by the design of a constituent role of the European Parliament. Although in Spinelli's view his last battle failed, it is interesting to remark that his objective was an intermediate step on the way towards the European Federation. The Draft Treaty for European Union, approved by the European Parliament on 14 February 1984, proposed the creation of the conditions for strengthening the government of the European

economy, but postponed the solution to the problem of the unification of foreign and security policy.

The fact is that the overcoming of the division of Europe into nation-states is an historical process which cannot be compared with the unification of the United States of America. The analogy is misleading. The unification of the thirteen republics in North America was an easy and quick undertaking, because the member states had a homogeneous structure, were of small size and had trifling power in world politics. Instead, European unification entails the overcoming of deep divisions among states that are proud of their independence and have been divided by sharp conflicts and bloody wars throughout the course of centuries. This means that the European federation is not emerging (and cannot emerge) as a full-fledged state at once. The model of Philadelphia (a constitutional convention that framed the federal constitution in four months), which suggests the idea that a qualitative leap can solve the problem of the transition from a confederation to a federation, is not fit for the political unification of Europe.

It took nearly fifteen years after the end of the war before Britain started to recognise that her future lay with Europe. The Suez crisis in 1956 was the starting point of a change of attitude toward Europe, since it showed that Britain was no more a

44 A. Spinelli, *Diario europeo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1989, vol. I, p. 423.

world power. Federalists realised that this was a good opportunity to enter the scene and campaign for Britain in Europe. But they had to face de Gaulle's double veto. The organisational and theoretical commitment of the British federalists led them to propose, during a conference of Federal Trust held in 1968, an ambitious plan, formulated by John Pinder, to convene a second Messina conference to create a European Political Community with the UK as a full member which would operate alongside the Economic Community, in order "to include foreign policy and security, defence technologies and monetary policy, with institutions that would become federal by the end of a transitional period".⁴⁵ George Brown, who had only recently resigned as foreign secretary, assured his support and Spinelli the support of Pietro Nenni, who was on the point of becoming the Italian foreign minister. The initiative of Britain and Italy was overtaken by de Gaulle's resignation in 1969, which opened the door of the European Community to Britain. The campaign for EC membership, led by the Director of the European Movement, Ernest Wistrich,⁴⁶ was a spectacular success. The federalists were again at the centre of the political scene.

45 R. Mayne, J. Pinder, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

46 E. Wistrich, *The Federalist Struggle in Britain*, "The Federalist", XXVI, 1984, n. 3, pp. 230-240.

The plan for the European Political Community was the starting point of a theoretical reflection which led the British federalists to elaborate a gradualist strategy for European unification combining Monnet's and Spinelli's approaches. Pinder reached the conclusion that "the constitutional federalism of Spinelli and functionalist federalism of Monnet can be seen to be complementary".⁴⁷ Michael Burgess had reached the same conclusions in his research on the influence of federalist ideas on the evolution of the European Community.⁴⁸ The evolution of the Italian federalists' thinking is convergent⁴⁹. Mario Albertini, the leader of the Italian branch of the UEF from the sixties to the nineties after the experience of the Congress of the European People, identified three strategic objectives: the direct election of the European Parliament, the Monetary Union and the Constitution, which have become the objectives of the UEF and then the stages of the institutional evolution of the European Union.

47 J. Pinder, *From Milan to Maastricht: Fifty Years of Federalist Struggle for the Uniting of Europe*, "The Federalist", XXXV, 1993, n. 3, p. 159.

48 M. Burgess, *Federalism and the European Union: Political Ideas, Influences and Strategies in the European Community, 1972-1987*, London-New York, Routledge, 1989.

49 J. Pinder, *Mario Albertini in the History of Federalist Thought*, "The Federalist", XLIV, 2002, n. 3, pp. 157-170.

There is a widespread recognition that the European institutions, and more generally the process of European integration, have eliminated from our horizons a prospect that was the nightmare of past generations: the spectre of a war between France and Germany. It is significant that this occurred without and before the European Federation.

This is a relatively new achievement of federalist theory. But we can support this idea as long as the process of European unification, and particularly the perspective of a unification of foreign, security and defence policies, remains open. Even the gravity of the current crisis, due to the rejection of the European constitution by the French and the Dutch peoples, is cause for optimism. Although imperfect and unaccomplished, the European democracy

represents a mighty bulwark against the danger of disruption of the EU. Most politicians hoping for reelection know that public opinion would never forgive them for breaking up a community that has proved to be able to assure peace, prosperity and democracy to a growing number of countries.

The convergence between the British and the Italian federalist schools shows that the European federalists are now sharing common views on the nature of European unification and the strategy to achieve the European federation. All the founders of Federal Union, except Charles Kimber, and of the Movimento Federalista Europeo are dead. Like Moses, they have died before reaching the Promised Land. It is up to the living generations to continue the path to its conclusion. □

