

Dear Madam, dear Sir,

I hope this letter finds you well. It asks you a question: do you think that the Hirschmanian diaspora may have a positive function in the world we live in? Are you considering your participation to our “A Bias for Hope” – the Conference on Albert Hirschman Legacy, sponsored by the Independent Evaluation Group of the World Bank and by A Colorni-Hirschman International Institute, that has been convened for the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> October 2018 in Washington D.C.? If so, the following letter starts discussing a few of the many topics that will come up in that occasion.

First of all, I feel honored. The well-known ups and down of the relationship between Albert Hirschman and the WB notwithstanding, it is marvelous, in my view, to re-consider part of the issues concerned retrospectively, and in loco. Many of us are not happy with the current world. Sometimes we are even scared that it may come back to the tragedies of the past – wars, dictatorships, genocides; and even worse. And, we think, it is useful to remember to ourselves that in the early ‘40s of last century Eugenio Colorni and Albert Hirschman thought that the classic era of the nation states was ending. They believed that national sovereignty would not (and should not) be unrestrained in the future. And that any conceivable effort should be made to influence human societies and governments (great powers included) to help the development of suitable policies for the people of the world. Therefore, when we will come to Washington D.C. to discuss some issues on development, democracy and other key themes of Albert Hirschman legacy, we will offer implicitly a modest, but deeply felt, sign of appreciation for the many UN activities, embryo of an international community and of a world government that we would like to see strengthened.

Moreover, we should look to the positive side of the coin, and work hard to go beyond the negative side - as much (and as soon) as possible. And in a logic of “incivilimento” – to use an old Italian concept. We should look to sustainable development, human rights, democracy, freedom, social justice, fraternity, struggle against poverty... Take for instance, “The Principle of Conservation and Mutation of Social Energy” (Hirschman 1984, Ch. IV). In the last part of his life (see, for instance, “Social Conflicts as Pillars of Democratic Market Societies” in Hirschman 1995, Ch. XX), Albert reached the conclusion that, within certain limits, properly channeled social conflicts, with their mix of individual and collective interests, are indeed useful in holding democratic market societies together, and in helping them renewing their advancements. Therefore, applied to this observation, the 1984 Principle tells us that the (often diverted to other aims) social energy can become an important input of development – in the small and in the big. With a double caveat: that we should be conscious of the shortcomings of the past and able, at the same time, of taking advantage of (actual and future) possible outcomes.

I hope that you are interested in these and in other Hirschmanian subjects. That you are going to write something about them (even a single page will do). And that at the Washington Conference you will take up some of the many “fils rouges” that can be developed out of Albert legacy...

Con molti cordiali saluti e auguri

Luca Meldolesi

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RSVP